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JOURNALISM, 'FAKE NEWS' & DISINFORMATION

Handbook for Journalism Education and Training

UNESCO Series on Journalism Education

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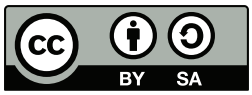

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Journalism, ‘Fake News’ & Disinformation

Handbook for Journalism Education and Training

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FOREWORD

UNESCO works to strengthen journalism education, and this publication is the latest offering in a line of cutting-edge knowledge resources.

It is part of the "Global Initiative for Excellence in Journalism Education", which is a focus of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). The Initiative seeks to engage with teaching, practising and researching of journalism from a global perspective, including sharing international good practices.

Accordingly, the current handbook seeks to serve as an internationally-relevant model curriculum, open to adoption or adaptation, which responds to the emerging global problem of disinformation that confronts societies in general, and journalism in particular.

It avoids assuming that the term 'fake news' has a straightforward or commonly-understood meaning.[1] This is because 'news' means verifiable information in the public interest, and information that does not meet these standards does not deserve the label of news. In this sense then, 'fake news' is an oxymoron which lends itself to undermining the credibility of information which does indeed meet the threshold of verifiability and public interest – i.e. real news.

To better understand the cases involving exploitative manipulation of the language and conventions of news genres, this publication treats these acts of fraud for what they are – as a particular category of phony information within increasingly diverse forms of disinformation, including in entertainment formats like visual memes.

In this publication, disinformation is generally used to refer to deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people through delivering dishonest information to them. This is often combined with parallel and intersecting communications strategies and a suite of other tactics like hacking or compromising of persons. Misinformation is generally used to refer to misleading information created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent. Both are problems for society, but disinformation is particularly dangerous because it is frequently organised, well resourced, and reinforced by automated technology.

The purveyors of disinformation prey on the vulnerability or partisan potential of recipients whom they hope to enlist as amplifiers and multipliers. In this way, they seek

1 See Tandoc E; Wei Lim, Z and Ling, R. (2018). "Defining 'Fake News': A typology of scholarly definitions" in *Digital Journalism* (Taylor and Francis) Volume 6, 2018 - Issue 2: 'Trust, Credibility, Fake News'.

to animate us into becoming conduits of their messages by exploiting our propensities to share information for a variety of reasons. A particular danger is that 'fake news' in this sense is usually free – meaning that people who cannot afford to pay for quality journalism, or who lack access to independent public service news media, are especially vulnerable to both disinformation and misinformation.

The spread of disinformation and misinformation is made possible largely through social networks and social messaging, which begs the question of the extent of regulation and self-regulation of companies providing these services. In their character as intermediary platforms, rather than content creators, these businesses have to date generally been subject to only light-touch regulation (except in the area of copyright). In the context of growing pressures on them, however, as well as the risks to free expression posed by over-regulation, there are increased – although patchy – steps in the frame of self-regulation.[2] In 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion focused his annual report on the issue, urging the Internet companies to learn from self-regulation in the news media, and to better align with UN standards on the right to impart, seek and receive information.[3] Within this fast evolving ecology of measures taken by both states and companies, there is a very significant role for journalists and news media, which is where this publication comes in.

Discerning differences

Disinformation and misinformation are both different to (quality) journalism which complies with professional standards and ethics. At the same time they are also different to cases of weak journalism that falls short of its own promise. Problematic journalism includes, for example, ongoing (and uncorrected) errors that arise from poor research or sloppy verification. It includes sensationalising that exaggerates for effect, and hyper-partisan selection of facts at the expense of fairness.

But this not to assume an ideal of journalism that somehow transcends all embedded narratives and points of view, with sub-standard journalism being coloured by ideology. Rather it is to signal all journalism contains narratives, and that the problem with sub-standard journalism is not the existence of narratives, but poor professionalism. This is why weak journalism is still not the same as disinformation or misformation.

Nevertheless, poor quality journalism sometimes allows disinformation and misinformation to originate in or leak into the real news system. But the causes

2 Manjoo, F. (2018). What Stays on Facebook and What Goes? The Social Network Cannot Answer. *New York Times*, 19 July, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/technology/facebook-misinformation.html; https://www.rt.com/usa/432604-youtube-invests-reputable-news/; https://youtube.googleblog.com/; https://sputniknews.com/asia/201807111066253096-whatsapp-seeks-help-fake-news/.

3 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. UN Human Rights Council 6 April 2018. A/HRC/38/35. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/096/72/PDF/G1809672.pdf?OpenElement.

and remedies for weak journalism are different to the case of disinformation and misinformation. At the same time, it is evident that strong ethical journalism is needed as an alternative, and antidote, to the contamination of the information environment and the spill-over effect of tarnishing of news more broadly.

Today, journalists are not just bystanders watching an evolving avalanche of disinformation and misinformation. They find themselves in its pathway too[4]. This means that:

- journalism faces the risk of being drowned out by the cacophony;
- journalists risk being manipulated by actors who go beyond the ethics of public relations by attempting to mislead or corrupt journalists into spreading disinformation[5];
- journalists as communicators who work in the service of truth, including "inconvenient truths", can find themselves becoming a target of lies, rumours and hoaxes designed to intimidate and discredit them and their journalism, especially when their work threatens to expose those who are commissioning or committing disinformation[6].

In addition, journalists need to recognise that while the major arena of disinformation is social media, powerful actors today are instrumentalising 'fake news' concerns to clamp down on the genuine news media. New and stringent laws are scapegoating news institutions as if they were the originators, or lumping them into broad new regulations which restrict all communications platforms and activities indiscriminately. Such regulations also often have insufficient alignment to the international principles requiring that limitations on expression should be demonstrably necessary, proportional and for legitimate purpose. Their effect, even if not always the intention, is to make genuine news media subject to a "ministry of truth" with the power to suppress information for purely political reasons.

In today's context of disinformation and misinformation, the ultimate jeopardy is not unjustifiable regulation of journalism, but that publics may come to disbelieve all content – including journalism. In this scenario, people are then likely to take as credible whatever content is endorsed by their social networks, and which corresponds with their hearts – but leaves out engagement with their heads. We can already see the negative impacts of this on public beliefs about health, science, intercultural understanding and the status of authentic expertise.

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4 Despite the threat, according to one study the newsrooms in one country lacked systems, budget and trained personnel dedicated to combating disinformation. See: Penplusbytes. 2018. *Media Perspectives on Fake News in Ghana*. https://www.academia.edu/36563734/Media_Perspectives_on_Fake_News_In_Ghana.

5 Butler, P. 2018. *How journalists can avoid being manipulated by trolls seeking to spread disinformation*. http://ijnet.org/en/blog/how-journalists-can-avoid-being-manipulated-trolls-seeking-spread-disinformation. See also Module Three of this handbook.

6 See Module Seven

This impact on the public is also especially concerning for elections, and to the very idea of democracy as a human right. What disinformation seeks, particularly during a poll, is not necessarily to convince the public to believe that its content is true, but to impact on agenda setting (on what people think is important) and to muddy the informational waters in order to weaken rationality factors in people's voting choices[7]. Likewise, the issues of migration, climate change and others can be highly impacted by uncertainty resulting from disinformation and misinformation.

These dangers are why confronting the rise of 'fake news' head-on is an imperative for journalism and journalism education. At the same time, the threats also constitute an opportunity to double down on demonstrating the value of news media. They provide a chance to underline in professional practice the distinctiveness of delivering verifiable information and informed comment in the public interest[8].

What journalism needs to do

In this context, it is a time for news media to tack more closely to professional standards and ethics, to eschew the publishing of unchecked information, and to take a distance from information which may interest some of the public but which is not in the public interest.

This publication is therefore also a timely reminder that all news institutions, and journalists whatever their political leanings, should avoid inadvertently and uncritically spreading disinformation and misinformation. In much news media today, the elimination of positions providing internal fact checking has to an extent led to the function now being assumed by the "fifth estate" of bloggers and other external actors who call out mistakes made by journalists – though after they are already disseminated.

This emergent phenomenon can be welcomed by news media as reinforcing society's interest in verifiable information. Journalists should bring the work of independent fact-checking groups to larger audiences. But they should know that where external actors demonstrate systemic failure in a given news outlet, this puts a question mark over at least that institution's brand as a professional source of news. The media should be careful that external post-publication corrections do not become a substitute for internal processes of quality control. Journalists have to do better and "get it right" in the first place, or forfeit the possibility of a society to have believable media.

In sum, a game of catch-up corrections by external watchdogs is not one in which journalism is a winner. Journalists cannot leave it to fact-checking organisations to do

7 Lipson, D (2018) *Indonesia's 'buzzers' paid to spread propaganda as political elite wage war ahead of election*, ABC News: http://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-13/indonesian-buzzers-paid-to-spread-propaganda-ahead-of-election/9928870?pfmredir=sm.

8 See also: Nordic Council of Ministers. 2018. *Fighting Fakes - the Nordic Way*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers. https://www.norden.org/en/publication/fighting-fakes-nordic-way.

the journalistic work of verifying questionable claims that are presented by sources (no matter whether such claims are reported in the media, or whether they bypass journalism and appear directly in social media). The ability of news practitioners to go beyond "he said, she said" journalism, and to investigate the veracity of claims made by those being covered has to be improved.

Journalism also needs to proactively detect and uncover new cases and forms of disinformation. This is mission critical for the news media, and it represents an alternative to regulatory approaches to 'fake news'. As an immediate response to a burning and damaging issue, it complements and strengthens more medium-term strategies such as media and information literacy which empower audiences to distinguish what is news, disinformation and misinformation. Disinformation is a hot story, and strong coverage of it will strengthen journalism's service to society.

This handbook therefore is a call to action. It is also an encouragement for journalists to engage in societal dialogue about how people at large decide on credibility and why some of them share unverified information. As with the news media, for journalism schools and their students, along with media trainers and their learners, this is a major opportunity for strong civic engagement with audiences. As an example, 'crowd-sourcing' is essential if media are to uncover and report on beneath-the-radar disinformation that is spread on social messaging or email.

UNESCO's roles

Funded by UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), this new resource provides a unique and holistic view of the different dynamics of the disinformation story, along with practical skills-building to complement the knowledge and understanding presented.[9] It is part of UNESCO's record of encouraging optimum performance and self-regulation by journalists, as an alternative to the risks of having state intervention to deal with perceived problems in the freedom of expression realm.

The publication comes on the heels of two earlier UNESCO works "Teaching Journalism for Sustainable Development: New Syllabi"[10] (2015), and "Model Curriculum for Journalism Education: A Compendium of New Syllabi" (2013)[11]. These publications in

9 The 61st meeting of the IPDC Bureau in 2017 decided to support the Global Initiative for Excellence in Journalism Education by making a special allocation to develop new syllabi on new key topics for journalism. Progress was reported to the 62nd meeting of the IPDC Bureau in 2018, which then allocated an additional amount to support this curriculum.

10 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233878.

11 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000221199.

turn are sequels to UNESCO's seminal "Model Curriculum on Journalism Education[12]" published in 2007 in nine languages.

Other publications of ongoing value and within UNESCO's publications relevant to journalism education and training include:

- Model course on the safety of journalists (2017)[13]
- Terrorism and the Media: a handbook for journalists (2017)[14]
- Climate Change in Africa: A Guidebook for Journalists (2013)[15]
- Global Casebook of Investigative Journalism (2012) [16]
- Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists (2011)[17]
- Conflict-sensitive reporting: state of the art; a course for journalists and journalism educators (2009)[18]

Each of these publications has proved valuable in scores of countries around the world, where journalism educators and trainers, as well as students and working journalists, have improved their practice in various ways. In some places, they have had the flexibility to adapt entire multi-year programmes in line with the new knowledge and inspiration; in others, it has been a matter of integrating elements from the UNESCO resources into existing courses. The quality and coherence of this new publication can be expected to generate the same value for readers.

Since UNESCO is an intergovernmental organisation, it does not take sides in the geopolitics of information contestation. As is well known, there are varying claims and counter-claims about disinformation. Such knowledge should inform the reading of this text, as well as inspire readers to help gather further evidence about various cases.

Meanwhile, avoiding relativism, the handbook firmly embeds within its pages the following competencies as constituting unassailable foundations for assessment and action:

12 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000151209.
13 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248297.
14 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247074.
15 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225451.
16 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217636.
17 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000193078.
18 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186986.

1. Knowledge that news – produced by transparent actors and which is verifiable - is essential for democracy, development, science, health and human progress,

2. Recognition that disinformation is not a side-show, and that combatting it is mission critical to news media,

3. Commitment to enhanced professional journalistic skills as essential if inclusive and accurate journalism is to compete as a credible alternative to counterfeit content.

Other powerful and vital literacies covered in this publication, which are especially relevant to journalists and news media outlets, include:

1. Knowledge and skills to set up newsroom systems to ensure that there is systematic monitoring, investigating and reporting on disinformation,

2. Knowledge about the value of partnerships between media institutions, journalism schools, NGOs, fact-checkers, communities, Internet companies and regulators, in combatting information pollution,

3. Knowledge about the need to engage the public on why it is important to cherish and defend journalism from being overwhelmed by disinformation or being targeted by malicious actors directing disinformation campaigns against journalists.

Overall, this publication should help societies become more informed about the range of societal responses to disinformation problems, including those by governments, international organisations, human rights defenders, Internet companies, and proponents of media and information literacy. It particularly highlights what can be done by journalists themselves and by the people who educate and train them.

We hope that, in its modest way, this handbook can help to reinforce the essential contribution that journalism can make to society – and also to the Sustainable Development Goals' ambition of "public access to information and fundamental freedoms". UNESCO thanks the editors and the contributors for making this publication a reality. It is therefore commended to you, the reader, and we welcome your feedback.

Guy Berger

Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development, UNESCO
Secretary of the IPDC

INTRODUCTION

Cherilyn Ireton and Julie Posetti[1]

To serve as a model curriculum, this handbook is designed to give journalism educators and trainers, along with students of journalism, a framework and lessons to help navigate the issues associated with 'fake news'. We also hope that it will be a useful guide for practising journalists.

It draws together the input of leading international journalism educators, researchers and thinkers who are helping to update journalism method and practice to deal with the challenges of misinformation and disinformation. The lessons are contextual, theoretical and in the case of online verification, extremely practical. Used together as a course, or independently, they can help refresh existing teaching modules or create new offerings. A suggestion of *How to use this handbook as a model curriculum* follows this introduction.

There was debate over the use of the words 'fake news' in the title and lessons. 'Fake news' is today so much more than a label for false and misleading information, disguised and disseminated as news. It has become an emotional, weaponised term used to undermine and discredit journalism. For this reason, the terms misinformation, disinformation and 'information disorder', as suggested by Wardle and Derakhshan[2], are preferred, but not prescribed[3] [4].

Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and 'Fake News', Disinformation and Propaganda

This handbook has been produced in a context of growing international concern about a 'disinformation war' in which journalism and journalists are prime targets. In early 2017, as this project was being commissioned by UNESCO, a relevant joint statement was issued by the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organisation of American States' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information. The Declaration expressed alarm at the spread of disinformation

1 Alice Matthews of ABC Australia and Tom Law of the Ethical Journalism Network contributed research, ideas and resources which are reflected in this introduction.

2 Module Two

3 The argument against using the term 'fake news' has been made by many writers and journalists themselves, including Basson, A. (2016) *If it's fake, it's not news.* https://www.news24.com/Columnists/AdriaanBasson/lets-stop-talking-about-fake-news-20170706.

4 Wardle, C et al. (2018). "Information Disorder: the essential glossary". Shorenstein Center, Harvard University. Available at: https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf?x25702.

and propaganda, and attacks on news media as 'fake news'. The Rapporteurs and Representatives specifically acknowledged the impacts on journalists and journalism:

> *"(We are) Alarmed at instances in which public authorities denigrate, intimidate and threaten the media, including by stating that the media is "the opposition" or is "lying" and has a hidden political agenda, which increases the risk of threats and violence against journalists, undermines public trust and confidence in journalism as a public watchdog, and may mislead the public by blurring the lines between disinformation and media products containing independently verifiable facts."* [5]

Disinformation is an old story, fuelled by new technology

Mobilising and manipulating information was a feature of history long before modern journalism established standards which define news as a genre based on particular rules of integrity. An early record dates back to ancient Rome[6], when Antony met Cleopatra and his political enemy Octavian launched a smear campaign against him with "short, sharp slogans written upon coins in the style of archaic Tweets."[7] The perpetrator became the first Roman Emperor and "fake news had allowed Octavian to hack the republican system once and for all".[8]

But the 21st century has seen the weaponisation of information on an unprecedented scale. Powerful new technology makes the manipulation and fabrication of content simple, and social networks dramatically amplify falsehoods peddled by States, populist politicians, and dishonest corporate entities, as they are shared by uncritical publics. The platforms have become fertile ground for computational propaganda[9], 'trolling'[10] and 'troll armies'[11]; 'sock-puppet' networks'[12], and 'spoofers'[13]. Then, there is the arrival of profiteering 'troll farms' around elections.[14]

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5 UN/OSCE/OAS/ACHPR (2017). Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation, Propaganda: https://www.osce.org/fom/302796?download=true. See also: Kaye, D (2017) Statement to the UN General Assembly on October 24th, 2017: https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22300&LangID=E.

6 See a timeline plotting selected manifestations of 'information disorder' - from Cleopatra's era to the present - in a guide published by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) Posetti, J & Matthews, A (2018): https://www.icfj.org/news/short-guide-history-fake-news-and-disinformation-new-icfj-learning-module.

7 Kaminska, I. (2017). *A lesson in fake news from the info-wars of ancient Rome.* Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/aaf2bb08-dca2-11e6-86ac-f253db7791c6.

8 ibid

9 See: Oxford Internet Institute's Computational Propaganda Project: https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/computational-propaganda/.

10 See Module Seven of this handbook for case studies demonstrating these threats

11 Rappler.com (2018) Fake News in the Philippines: Dissecting the Propaganda Machine https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/rich-media/199895-fake-news-documentary-philippines-propaganda-machine.

12 Gent, E. (2017). Sock puppet accounts unmasked by the way they write and post. https://www.newscientist.com/article/2127107-sock-puppet-accounts-unmasked-by-the-way-they-write-and-post/.

13 Le Roux, J. (2017). Hidden hand drives social media smears. https://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-27-00-hidden-hand-drives-social-media-smears.

14 Silverman, C et al (2018) *American Conservatives Played a Role in the Macedonian Fake News Boom of 2016* Buzzfeed https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/american-conservatives-fake-news-macedonia-paris-wade-libert.

Although times and technologies are different, history can give us insight into the causes and consequences of the contemporary phenomenon of 'information disorder' that this handbook seeks to address. To ensure nuanced reporting of this crisis, journalists, journalism trainers and educators (along with their students) are encouraged to study disinformation, propaganda, hoaxes and satire as historical features of the communications ecology.[15]

The development of journalistic strategies to combat disinformation should therefore be undertaken in the knowledge that information manipulation goes back millennia, while the evolution of journalistic professionalism is comparatively recent[16]. As journalism has evolved, fulfilling a normative role in contemporary society, the news media has mostly been able to operate apart from the world of fabrication and covert attack, shielded by journalism that aspires to professional standards of truth-telling, methodologies of verification, and ethics of public interest. Journalism has itself gone through many phases and iterations of differentiating itself from the pack. Today, even with a variety of 'journalisms', it is still possible to identify the diversity of narratives in real news stories as members of a common family of distinct ethics-driven communications practice which also seeks to be editorially independent of political and commercial interests. But before the evolution of such standards, there were few rules about the integrity of information being put into mass circulation.

The spread of Gutenberg's printing press from the mid-15th century onwards was indispensable to the rise of professional journalism, but the technology also enabled amplification of propaganda and hoaxes which sometimes implicated media institutions as perpetrators.[17] Broadcasting took possibilities for propaganda, hoaxes and spoofs to a new level as, inter alia, the now infamous *War of the Worlds* radio drama demonstrated in 1938.[18] The rise of international broadcasting also often saw instrumentalisations of information beyond the parameters of professional and independent news, although purely 'invented' stories and direct falsifications have generally been more the exception than the rule in the narratives of different players.

We can learn something, too, from the long history of people being taken in by 'April Fool's' jokes – including the occasional journalist[19]. Even today, it is often the case

15 Posetti, J and Matthews, A (2018) A short guide to the history of 'fake news': A learning module for journalists and journalism educators ICFJ https://www.icfj.org/news/short-guide-history-fake-news-and-disinformation-new-icfj-learning-module.

16 See Module Three of this handbook

17 See for example, what is said to the first-large scale news hoax – '*The Great Moon Hoax*' of 1835. Detailed here: Thornton, B. (2000). *The Moon Hoax: Debates About Ethics in 1835 New York Newspapers*, Journal of Mass Media Ethics 15(2), pp. 89-100. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327728JMME1502_3.

18 Schwartz, A.B. (2015). *The Infamous "War of The Worlds" Radio Broadcast Was a Magnificent Fluke*, The Smithsonian. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/infamous-war-worlds-radio-broadcast-was-magnificent-fluke-180955180/#h2FAexeJmuCHJfSt.99.

19 Laskowski, A. (2009). *How a BU Prof April-Fooled the Country: When the joke was on the Associated Press*, BU Today. https://www.bu.edu/today/2009/how-a-bu-prof-april-fooled-the-country/.

that news satire – which has played an important role in the service of accountability journalism[20] - is misunderstood by social media users who disseminate it as if it were straight news.[21] [22] In some cases, echoing historical manifestations, there are layers beneath layers, with purportedly satirical sites being part of a wider network designed to reap internet advertising profits via gullible consumers who click and share. This affects not only 'imposter' content, but also the credibility of news[23] – which is all the more reason why journalists should make determined efforts to ensure their reporting is accurate in the first place. It is also a strong argument for societies to equip audiences with the competencies of Media and Information Literacy[24] so that people have a clear and critical appreciation of the evolving genres and conventions across news media, advertising, entertainment and social media.

History also teaches us that the forces behind disinformation do not necessarily expect to persuade journalists or broader audiences about the truth of false claims, as much as cast doubt on the status of verifiable information produced by professional news producers. This confusion means that many news consumers feel increasingly entitled to choose or create their own 'facts', sometimes aided by politicians seeking to shield themselves from legitimate critique.

Fast forward to 2018 and the proliferation of powerful new technological tools. These, along with the character of social media and messaging platforms that have limited quality control standards for determining what constitutes news, make it easy to counterfeit and mimic legitimate news brands to make frauds look like the real thing. Increasingly, it is also possible to engineer audio and video in ways that go beyond legitimate news editing in order to make it appear that a particular individual said or did something in some place, and to pass this off as an authentic record[25], sending it viral in the social communications environment.

Today, social media is fuelled by many kinds of content, ranging from the personal to the political. There are many instances produced overtly or covertly by governments, and/or an industry of public relations companies under contract to political or commercial actors. As a result, countless bloggers, Instagram 'influencers' and YouTube stars promote products and politicians without disclosing that they are paid to do so. Covert

20 Baym, G (2006) *The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism* in Political Communication Taylor and Francis Volume 22, 2005 - Issue 3 pp 259-276 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10584600591006492.

21 Woolf, N. (2016) *As fake news takes over Facebook feeds, many are taking satire as fact*, The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/nov/17/facebook-fake-news-satire.

22 Abad-Santos, A. (2012). *The Onion Convinces Actual Chinese Communists that Kim Jong-Un is Actually the Sexiest Man Alive*, The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/11/onion-convinces-actual-chinese-communists-kim-jong-un-actually-sexiest-man-alive/321126/.

23 See Module Three of this handbook for an expansion on this theme

24 See Module Four

25 Solon, O (2017) *The future of fake news: Don't believe everything you see, hear or read* in The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jul/26/fake-news-obama-video-trump-face2face-doctored-content.

payments are also made to commentators (often with false identities) who seek to affirm, discredit or intimidate in online fora. In the midst of this, journalism loses ground, and itself becomes a subject not just of fair criticism, but also existential attack.

Now, the danger is the development of an 'arms race' of national and international disinformation spread through partisan 'news' organisations and social media channels, polluting the information environment for all sides in a way that can come back to haunt the initiators themselves.[26] Where disinformation campaigns have been exposed, the result has been major damage to the actors involved – both the implementing agencies and their political clients (see the recent cases of Bell-Pottinger [27] [28] [29] [30] and Cambridge Analytica[31] [32]).

The consequence of all this is that digitally fuelled disinformation, in contexts of polarisation, risks eclipsing the role of journalism. Even more, journalism based on verifiable information shared in the public interest – a recent historical achievement that is by no means guaranteed – can itself become discredited when precautions are not taken to avoid it being manipulated. When journalism becomes a vector for disinformation, this further reduces public trust and promotes the cynical view that there is no distinction between different narratives within journalism on the one hand, and narratives of disinformation on the other. This is why the history around the contested use of content, and its various forms, is instructive. Appreciating the multi-faceted evolution of 21st century 'information disorder' should aid better understanding of the causes and consequences of an unprecedented global threat – one that ranges from harassment of journalists by state-sanctioned 'troll armies' to the manipulation of elections, damage to public health and failure to recognise the risks of climate change.

A handbook to help counter the disinformation crisis

As a curriculum, this handbook falls into two distinct parts: the first three modules frame the problem and give it context; the next four focus on responses to 'information disorder' and its consequences.

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26 Winseck, D (2008). Information Operations 'Blowback': Communication, Propaganda and Surveillance in the Global War on Terrorism. *International Communication Gazette* 70 (6), 419-441. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1748048508096141.

27 The African Network of Centers for Investigative Journalism, (2017).*The Guptas, Bell Pottinger and the fake news propaganda machine*, TimeLive. https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-09-04-the-guptas-bell-pottinger-and-the-fake-news-propaganda-machine/.

28 Cameron, J. (2017) *Dummy's guide: Bell Pottinger – Gupta London agency, creator of WMC*, BizNews and Segal, D. (2018) *How Bell Pottinger, P.R. Firm for Despots and Rogues, Met Its End in South Africa*. New York Times, 4 Feb 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/business/bell-pottinger-guptas-zuma-south-africa.html.

29 Haffajee, F. (2017). *Ferial Haffajee: The Gupta fake news factory and me*. HuffPost South Africa. [online] Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/06/05/ferial-haffajee-the-gupta-fake-news-factory-and-me_a_22126282/.

30 See Module Seven

31 Lee, G. (2018). Q&A on *Cambridge Analytica: The allegations so far, explained*, FactCheck, Channel 4 News. https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/cambridge-analytica-the-allegations-so-far.

32 Cassidy, J. (2018). *Cambridge Analytica Whistleblower claims that cheating swung the Brexit vote*, The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/a-cambridge-analytica-whistleblower-claims-that-cheating-swung-the-brexit-vote.

Module One, *Why it matters: truth, trust and journalism*[33] will encourage thinking about the broader significance and consequences of disinformation and misinformation, and how they feed the crisis of confidence in journalism.

The second module, *Thinking about 'information disorder': formats of misinformation and disinformation*[34] unpacks the problem and gives a framework for understanding the dimensions of the problem.

In the 21st century, in most parts of the world, the fragile trust in media was declining before social media platforms entered the news arena, offering spaces and tools for anyone to share information.[35] The reasons are varied and complex. The 24/7 online world with its insatiable demand for news content at a time of newsroom cutbacks changed journalism, as is outlined in Module Three, *News industry transformation: digital technology, social platforms and the spread of misinformation and disinformation*.[36] Now, it is the sheer scale, enterprise and reach of fraudulent news being shared online that has created a fresh crisis for journalism, with implications for journalists, media and society.[37]

So, how should those promoting journalism, including educators, practitioners and media policymakers respond? *Combatting misinformation through Media and Information Literacy*[38] is the subject of Module Four.

In the end, it is the discipline of verification that separates professional journalism from the rest[39] and this is the focus of Module Five, *Verification: fact-checking 101*[40]; Module Six, *Social media verification: assessing sources and visual content*[41] is very practical, dealing with challenges of verification and evidence-based journalism which have been thrown up by digital technology and social media.

In the process of enabling everyone to be part of the news process, the social web has resulted in the loss of centralised gatekeepers.[42] Journalism is feeling the consequences, but as with any technology-driven disruption, it takes time to assess, measure and formulate responses. There is inevitably a period of catch-up before research and concrete best practice emerge.

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33 See Module One

34 See Module Two

35 Edelman. (2017). *2017 Edelman Trust Barometer- Global Results. Available at* https://www.edelman.com/global-results/.

36 See Module Three

37 Viner, K. (2017). *A mission for journalism in a time of crisis.* [*online*] *The Guardian. Available at* https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/16/a-mission-for-journalism-in-a-time-of-crisis.

38 See Module Four

39 Kovach, B. & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect. New York: Crown Publishers.

40 See Module Five

41 See Module Six

42 Colón, A. (2017). *You are the new gatekeeper of the news.* [*online*] *The Conversation. Available at* https://theconversation.com/you-are-the-new-gatekeeper-of-the-news-71862.

Disinformation is a truly global problem, extending beyond the political sphere to all aspects of information, including climate change, entertainment, etc. However, to date, many of the documented case studies, initial responses and early funding for research and tools, have emanated from the U.S. where the global tech giants are headquartered, and US President Donald Trump's accusations that media institutions and journalists are proponents of 'fake news' have stirred action and funding.

The global picture is evolving daily, particularly with responses from individual States – many of which are considering regulation and legislation to tackle the problem. The tech giants, too, have stepped up efforts to try to engineer disinformation and misinformation off their platforms.

While this publication was being developed, the European Commission produced a report[43] based on an inquiry[44], amid concerns that disinformation and misinformation are harmful to all of society.[45] Politicians and public policy bodies in individual countries from Australia to the Philippines, Canada, France, the UK, Brazil, India and Indonesia were considering what to do in response.[46] Regarding legislation, Germany moved first with a new law to fine digital platforms heavily if they do not remove 'illegal content', including 'fake news' and hate speech, within 24 hours of being reported.[47] Malaysia's parliament also passed an Anti-Fake News Bill in April 2018, but this was repealed in August.[48] An updated list of state responses has been compiled by Poynter.[49]

Freedom of expression advocates fear that legislation will hurt the very democratisation of information and opinion that new technologies have enabled. In some countries, legislation could be used to silence critical media.[50]

For many journalists, who believe strongly in freedom of expression and have long regarded themselves as essential support players in democratic societies[51], how to

43 European Commission (2018). Final report of the High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation.

44 European Commission (2017). *Next steps against fake news: Commission sets up High-Level Expert Group and launches public consultation.* [*online*] *Available at* https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_17_4481.

45 Ansip, A. (2017). *Hate speech, populism and fake news on social media – towards an EU response.* Available at https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/hate-speech-populism-and-fake-news-on-social-media--towards-an-eu-response-extracts-from-the-debate_I136357.

46 Malloy, D. (2017). *How the world's governments are fighting fake news.* [*online*] *ozy.com.*

47 Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection. (2017). *Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks (Network Enforcement Act, netzdg*). [*online*]. Available at*:* https://www.bmj.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Gesetzgebung/RefE/NetzDG_engl.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4.

48 Malaysia scraps 'fake news' law used to stifle free speech. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/17/malaysia-scraps-fake-news-law-used-to-stifle-free-speech.

49 Funke, D. (2018). *A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world* (Poynter). Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/guide-anti-misinformation-actions-around-world.

50 Nossel, S. (2017). *FAKING NEWS: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth.* [ebook] PEN America Available at https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2017_Faking-News-11.2.pdf.

51 McNair, B. (2009). Journalism and Democracy. In: K. Wahl-Jorgensen and T. Hanitzsch, ed., *Handbook of Journalism Studies,* 6th ed. [online] New York: Routledge

deal with 'information disorder' is a complex issue. It is also personal: online attacks on journalists, particularly women, are all too common and in many cases they pose physical and psychological danger while chilling journalism, as outlined in Module Seven *Combatting online abuse: when journalists and their sources are targeted*.[52]

Disinformation and misinformation go beyond challenging journalists' reputations and safety. They question their purpose and effectiveness, and they perpetuate the degradation of journalism to the detriment of civic discourse. Improving standards and social relevance is in the interests of all future journalists, and to society as a whole. This handbook should challenge researchers, students and practitioners alike to consider and debate how journalism can better serve open societies and democracies in the new context because:

> *"A functioning press and democracy require criticism, transparency, and consequences for journalistic mistakes. They also require that we're able to collectively distinguish them from lies and deception. Otherwise...real information will be painted as fake, and manufactured (rubbish) gets presented as fact." - Craig Silverman*[53]

A note on ethics and self-regulation

Professional standards for ethical and accountable journalism are an important defence against disinformation and misinformation. Norms and values providing guidance to people doing journalism have evolved over the years to give journalism its distinctive mission and modus operandi. In turn, these uphold verifiable information and informed comment shared in the public interest. It is these factors that underpin the credibility of journalism. As such, they are woven into the fabric of this handbook.

In this context, it is worth citing what Professor Charlie Beckett from the London School of Economics sums up as the potential value of the 'fake news' crisis for journalism:

> *"...fake news is the best thing that has happened for decades. It gives mainstream quality journalism the opportunity to show that it has value based on expertise, ethics, engagement and experience. It is a wake-up call to be more transparent, relevant, and to add value to people's lives. It can develop a new business model of fact-checking, myth-busting and generally getting its act together as a better alternative to fakery."*[54]

While seeking to be 'truth-tellers', journalists cannot always guarantee 'truth'. Nevertheless, striving to get the facts right, and producing content that accurately

52 See Module Seven

53 Silverman, C. (2018). I Helped Popularize The Term "Fake News" And Now I Cringe Every Time I Hear It. BuzzFeed. Available at https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/i-helped-popularize-the-term-fake-news-and-now-i-cringe.

54 Beckett, C. (2017). 'Fake news': *The best thing that's happened to Journalism at Polis.* http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2017/03/11/fake-news-the-best-thing-thats-happened-to-journalism/.

reflects the facts, are cardinal principles of journalism. But what does ethical journalism look like in the Digital Age?

Ethical journalism that values transparent practice and accountability is a vital piece of the armoury in the battle to defend facts and truth in an era of 'information disorder'. News journalists must be independent voices. This means not acting, formally or informally, on behalf of special interests. It also means acknowledging and publicly declaring anything that might constitute a conflict of interest - in the interests of transparency. As Professor Emily Bell of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University has explained, core professional journalism values are about:

> *"Making sure news is accurate, being accountable for it if it is not accurate, being transparent about the source of stories and information, standing up to governments, pressure groups, commercial interests, the police, if they intimidate, threaten or censor you. Protecting your sources against arrest and disclosure. Knowing when you have a strong enough public interest defence to break the law and being prepared to go to jail to defend your story and sources. Knowing when it is unethical to publish something. Balancing individual rights to privacy with the broader right of the public interest."*[55]

In the face of unscrupulous politics, the crisis of 'information disorder', manifestation of online hate, proliferation of 'content-marketing', advertising, and the self-serving spin of public relations, news organisations and journalists should still prize ethical journalism as the central pillar of a sustainable model of practice - even while battling financial and trust crises. Democracies, too, should have a role in defending journalism, and in protecting them and their sources where public interest justifications come into play.

Ethical codes[56], designed to support information gathering and verification in the public interest, are what distinguish journalism, and in particular news reportage, from other types of communication. This is of increased significance in the Digital Age where there is not just a democratisation of communications, but also a constant flow of disinformation, misinformation, falsehoods and abuse. In this context, ethical journalism is even more important, as a framework for establishing models of journalism that favour trust and accountability in the interests of building meaningfully engaged relationships with audiences.

Trust in reporting that is accurate, accountable and independent, is essential to winning over audiences and enabling a common public sphere in which debate can occur on the

55 Bell, E. (2015). *Hugh Cudlipp Lecture* (Full text), The Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/jan/28/emily-bells-2015-hugh-cudlipp-lecture-full-text.

56 See, for example, the Australian Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance's 'Journalist Code of Ethics'. Available at: https://www.meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/.

basis of shared facts. Informed audiences who engage with, and share, credible content are essential antidotes to the spread of disinformation and misinformation.

To embed and enforce these core values in a changing media environment, newsrooms and media organisations adopt and adapt codes of conduct and create mechanisms for the public to hold them to account - press councils, readers' editors, editorial policies, and internal ombudsmen are features of these self-regulation structures. Such structures allow for errors to be identified in a professional peer-review context, they can facilitate public acknowledgement of mistakes and require corrections, and they help to enforce professional norms concerning the standard of publishing in the public interest. While often derided as 'toothless tigers' by critics who favour external regulation of the news media, these structures serve an important purpose in the context of the disinformation crisis: they help strengthen professional accountability and transparency and thereby can reinforce community trust in journalism. They also help to mark out the distinctive characteristics of journalism that adopts the discipline of verification to achieve accuracy and reliability, distinguishing it from disinformation, propaganda, advertising and public relations.

From 'journalist' to journalism

The days when journalistic ethics were confined to the business (if not always fully respected) of a career or occupation/profession have become history. This is widely recognised, including by the United Nations, such as in the Secretary General's 2017 report on Safety of Journalists A/72/290[57], which reads:

> *"The term 'journalist' includes journalists and other media workers. Journalism is defined in document CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 44, as 'a function shared by a wide range of actors, including professional full-time reporters and analysts, as well as bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication in print, on the Internet or elsewhere."*[58]

In the same spirit, UNESCO's General Conference refers to "journalists, media workers and social media producers who generate a significant amount of journalism, online and offline" (Resolution 39, November 2017)[59]. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, endorsed by the UN's Chief Executives Board in 2012, notes: "the protection of journalists should not be limited to those formally recognized as journalists, but should cover others, including community media workers

57 Available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1304392?ln=en.

58 See also UN documents A/HRC/20/17, paras. 3-5, A/HRC/20/22 and Corr.1, para. 26, A/HRC/24/23, para. 9, A/HRC/27/35, para. 9, A/69/268, para. 4, and A/HRC/16/44 and Corr.1, para. 47.

59 Records of the General Conference. 39th session. Paris, 30 October – 14 November 2017. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002608/260889e.pdf.

and citizen journalists and others who may be using new media as a means of reaching their audiences".[60]

Journalism, in this light, can be seen as an activity guided by ethical standards of verifiable information shared in the public interest. Those who claim to do journalism may extend wider than those who are journalists in the occupational sense, while those who are employed as, or who identify as journalists, may occasionally or even systematically fall short of producing content that counts as accurate, fair, professional and independent journalism in the public interest. What matters is not the formal or claimed status as much as the character of the content being produced.

While journalism is based on the exercise of freedom of expression, which is every individual´s right, it is a specialised exercise which sets itself up as adhering to specific standards that mark it out from other forms of expression (e.g. poetry, public relations, advertising, disinformation, etc.). These standards are intimately bound up with the ethics of professional journalistic practice.

Is transparency the new objectivity?

Objectivity can mean many things. In the sense of a distance from subjectivity, it is a contentious theme in professional journalism. It can be striven for, but it is rarely possible, and may not always be desirable in the face of brutality or inhumanity (for example, fair and independent reporting would not give the same moral credence to the claims of those who have been convicted of committing war crimes as those of people who have survived them – although even the latter should not be above investigation into their veracity). But **fairness, independence, accuracy, contextuality, transparency, protection of confidential sources and perspicacity**[61] in reporting build trust, credibility and confidence.

In 2009, Harvard University researcher Dr David Weinberger declared that, "Transparency is the new objectivity"[62]. The same year, the former Director of the BBC's Global News Division, Richard Sambrook, explained that transparency, not objectivity, was delivering trust in the 'new media age':

> *"...news today still has to be accurate and fair, but it is as important for the readers, listeners and viewers to see how the news is produced, where the information comes from, and how it works. The emergence of news is as important, as the delivering of the news itself."*[63]

60 UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. 1CI-12/CONF.202/6 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384476.

61 See 'core principles' in the next chapter

62 Weinberger, D. (2009). *Transparency is the new objectivity.* http://www.hyperorg.com/blogger/2009/07/19/transparency-is-the-new-objectivity/.

63 Bunz, M. (2009). *How Social Networking is Changing Journalism.* https://www.theguardian.com/media/pda/2009/sep/18/oxford-social-media-convention-2009-journalism-blogs.

Points of difference

The core components of professional journalistic practice above do not mean there is just one form of journalism. These objectives can be fulfilled in a range of journalistic styles and stories, each embodying different narratives that in turn are based on different values and varying perspectives of fairness, contextuality, relevant facts, etc. For example, media outlets may have varying takes on a given news story (some even ignoring it), without moving out of the 'information business' into the realms of disinformation and misinformation (see next chapter *Using this handbook as a model curriculum*, and Modules 1, 2 and 3). However, it is when content departs from journalistic principles per se, and especially when it still poses as news, that we are no longer dealing with journalism, but a particular form of disinformation.

This Introductory chapter has highlighted the range of issues raised by the 'fake news' debate, providing the context for the explication, analysis and learning modules that follow.

USING THIS HANDBOOK AS A MODEL CURRICULUM

Julie Posetti

This course adopts a heuristic pedagogical model[1], meaning that users are encouraged to bring their own experiences to the process. The lessons are not intended to be prescriptive; rather they can and should be adapted to suit particular national, cultural, institutional, and industry contexts of teaching and learning. While efforts have been made to ensure they have global appeal, there are invariably still limitations. The authors strongly encourage educators, instructors and participants to infuse the case studies, examples and sources provided with those reflecting experiences in their own regions, in their own languages.

With this in mind, the following are possible ways to use the handbook:

- As a comprehensive course/subject introduced to an existing higher education degree/major in Journalism, Communications, Digital Media, or Media Studies. It could also be offered as an elective in politics and sociology courses engaging with media and communications issues
- As a resource to supplement an existing course/subject (e.g. Media History; Media Ethics; Sourcing and Verifying News; Media Criticism; Digital Media Practice; Social Journalism). Many of the case studies, lecture materials and suggested readings could be incorporated into existing courses/subjects as a means of updating content to deal with the rapidly emerging disinformation crisis
- As stand-alone subjects or a comprehensive course offered to journalists, human rights defenders and other journalism practitioners by news organisations, industry bodies, or media development agencies
- As a training manual: Journalism trainers may wish to adapt these modules for their own purposes, relying on the lists of recommended readings and case studies for inclusion in a more niche set of resources targeting groups of journalists
- As inspiration for a series of blog posts hosted by industry organisations, media outlets, or media development agencies as part of a knowledge-sharing exercise

1 Banda, F (Ed) 2015 Teaching Journalism for Sustainable Development: New Syllabi (UNESCO, Paris http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002338/233878e.pdf).

- As a reading resource for practising journalists for their intellectual enrichment and professional development. For example, many of the techniques examined can be deployed in reporting tasks through 'self-directed learning'. Some case studies might also serve as inspiration for more sophisticated reporting, with local story ideas able to be explored with more complex contextual underpinnings (e.g. a story about a hoax that fooled local journalists could be reported in the context of the history of hoaxes internationally, with an emphasis on recent developments in the viral distribution of disinformation and misinformation via social media)
- As the foundation of a collection of readings, resources and tools designed to grow as research and practice in this emerging field expand.

Core principles

Aided by process transparency and explicit application of ethical standards, journalism's distinctive role today lies in its capacity to contribute clarity and build trust around verified content. The following seven principles, which are to varying extents about ethics, should inform the execution of this course, and guide exercises, discussions and assessments[2]:

- **Accuracy:** Journalists cannot always guarantee 'truth' but being accurate and getting the facts right remains a cardinal principle of journalism.
- **Independence:** Journalists must be independent voices. This means not acting, formally or informally, on behalf of special interests and declaring anything that might constitute a conflict of interest, in the interests of transparency.
- **Fairness:** Fair reporting of information, events, sources and their stories involves sifting, weighing and evaluating information open-mindedly and perspicaciously. Providing context and presenting a range of competing perspectives builds trust and confidence in reportage.
- **Confidentiality:** One of the foundational tenets of investigative journalism is the protection of confidential sources (with the narrowest of exceptions). This is essential for maintaining the trust of information sources (including whistleblowers) and, in some cases, ensuring the safety of those sources.[3]

2 Note: Five of these seven principles draw on the Ethical Journalism Network's 'Five Core Principles of Journalism' https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are. However, 'fairness' is favoured over 'impartiality' here, as impartiality is frequently conflated with objectivity, and it is often misunderstood as requiring all sources and facts to be weighed equally. This is a problematic concept for the same reasons that 'objectivity' is now a contested idea in journalism.

3 Posetti, J. (2017). *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age* (UNESCO) http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248054E.pdf.

- **Humanity:** What journalists publish or broadcast can be necessarily hurtful (e.g. the humiliation experienced by a corrupt politician once exposed by good investigative journalism), yet the impact of journalism on the lives of others must be considered. The public interest is the guiding principle here.[4] Humanity also means consideration of problems faced by disadvantaged groups, even if not necessarily going as far, for example, as adopting a persistently social-justice oriented style of journalism.

- **Accountability** is a sure sign of professionalism and ethical journalism[5]; correcting errors promptly, prominently and sincerely; listening to the concerns of audiences[6] and responding to them. Such practices can manifest in news organisations' guidance notes and self-regulatory bodies that hold journalism to account based on voluntary professional codes of conduct.

- **Transparency** in practice supports accountability and assists in the development and maintenance of trust in journalism.[7]

In this context, and alongside the independence of journalism, the issues of media freedom and pluralism are also significant. Pluralism of institutions, as well as diversity of staff, sources and research materials, are essential if there is to be a contribution by journalism as a whole to democracy and the sustainability of open societies. Participatory media, such as community radio and social media, are also important to ensure that the voices of under-represented or disadvantaged groups are not at the margins of news making. Pluralism also means recognising the validity of a range of narratives within ethical journalistic practice, while identifying disinformation, propaganda, and other types of content which fall outside professional standards. (See Modules 1, 2 and 3).

Questions for consideration

Any discussion about ethical journalism practice in a world where disinformation, misinformation and propaganda are viral could helpfully begin with consideration of the following questions:

- What exactly is journalism in the Digital Age? (A question that moves conversations from 'Who is a journalist?' to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary journalism)

4 For a new ethical model applying empathy in the Digital Era see: Shelton, A. G., Pearson, M. & Sugath, S. (2017) *Mindful Journalism and News Ethics in the Digital Era: A Buddhist Approach.* Routledge, London. https://www.crcpress.com/Mindful-Journalism-and-News-Ethics-in-the-Digital-Era-A-Buddhist-Approach/Gunaratne-Pearson-Senarath/p/book/9781138306066.

5 See: https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/accountable-journalism-codes-of-ethics.

6 Locker, K. & Kang, A. (2018). *Focused listening can help address journalism's trust problem*, at American Press Institute. https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/focused-listening-trust/.

7 Aronson-Rath, R. (2017). *Transparency is the antidote to fake news* on NiemanLab, December 2017 http://www.niemanlab.org/2017/12/transparency-is-the-antidote-to-fake-news/.

- What separates journalism from the broader creation and publication of content (including advertising, marketing, public relations, disinformation and misinformation) on and offline?
- Whose interests should a practitioner of journalism serve?
- Should practitioners of journalism be held accountable for the content they produce/publish? If so, why, and by whom? If not, why not?
- What ethical obligations to their sources, subjects, and audiences do journalism practitioners have?
- What fresh ethical dilemmas now need to be considered by journalism practitioners in the context of 'information disorder'?

Assessment criteria

The over-arching purpose of this publication is to deepen critical thinking capacities and strengthen defences among student journalists, professional journalists and others who undertake 'acts of journalism'. Accuracy and verification standards, along with adherence to core ethical values, research depth and critical analysis, should feature as key assessment criteria.

Suggested assessment criteria for theoretical assignments:

- Accuracy and verification (e.g. have the sources cited been accurately represented; have appropriate verification methods been deployed?)
- Strength of research (e.g. to what extent has the participant sought to find strong, relevant data/sources to support their arguments/findings?)
- Quality of the arguments and analysis (how original and sophisticated are the arguments and analysis undertaken?)
- Written expression (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure)
- How effectively does the essay/report demonstrate the module learning outcomes?

Suggested assessment criteria for practical/journalistic assignments:

- Accuracy and verification (e.g. have the sources cited been accurately represented and appropriately identified; have appropriate verification methods been deployed?)
- Strength of research (e.g. to what extent has the participant sought to find strong, relevant data/sources to support her/his arguments/findings?)

- Critical analysis (e.g. how thoughtfully does the participant interrogate the key issues for the audience?)
- Originality
- Narrative strength (e.g. what is the impact of the story/production on readers/viewers/listeners?)
- Production values (e.g. strength of audio/video editing and multimedia elements)
- Written expression (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure)
- Adherence to core ethical values expressed in professional codes

Delivery mode

These modules are designed to be taught either face-to-face or online. In the execution of many of the lessons, participants would benefit from a collaborative learning environment either online (via a learning platform like Moodle, or using Facebook Groups, for example) or face-to-face.

Most lessons follow a model in two parts, presenting theoretical learning (e.g. using seminars, readings or lecture-based presentations), supplemented by practical exercises (e.g. working groups assigned to verification exercises). Typically, this involves a 60-90 minute theoretical component, and a 90 minute-two hour workshop or tutorial. These sessions can be expanded, contracted or divided and/or spread across different days depending on the teaching/learning framework of the institution concerned. An assignment is suggested for each module.

Wherever possible, lecturers and instructors are encouraged to engage industry practitioners and experts in interactive lectures and fora, and to ensure that current case studies, issues and debates are incorporated into the curriculum.

Additionally, the course designers encourage lecturers/instructors to incorporate local/regional, linguistically and culturally relevant materials and examples into the lessons.

Materials and resources

Instructors and participants will require internet connectivity and would benefit from access to academic databases and/or Google Scholar.

A primary site for additional learning resources connected to the practical application of the overall learning outcomes is First Draft News.[8]

8 https://firstdraftnews.org/.

Please note: the content and resources provided in this handbook should be appropriately credited to the curriculum editors and contributing authors.

Pedagogical approach

This specialised model course follows publication of several model curricula for journalism education[9] by UNESCO, beginning in 2007. The pedagogical approach also draws on UNESCO's *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers*[10] and the *Model Course on Safety of Journalists*[11] through which instructors encourage and implement the following:

- Issue-inquiry Approach
- Problem-based Learning (PBL)
- Scientific Inquiry
- Case Study
- Cooperative Learning
- Textual Analysis
- Contextual Analysis
- Translations
- Simulations
- Production

Additionally, instructors delivering this curriculum are encouraged to explore the concept of journalistic 'project-based learning'[12] – an approach which develops learning outcomes through the application and testing of skills in the course of journalistic content production. Learners should also be aware of the potential to produce quick, snappy and viral counters to disinformation, and be given space to put this method into practice.[13]

9 UNESCO's Model Curricula for Journalism Education (2007). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000151209. See also UNESCO's Model Curricula For Journalism Education: a compendium of new syllabi (2013). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000221199; and Teaching Journalism for Sustainable Development: new syllabi (2015). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233878.

10 Wilson, C., Grizzle, A., Tuazon, R., Akyempong, K. and Cheung, C. (2011). Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers. [ebook] Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000192971.

11 UNESCO (2017) Model Course on Safety of Journalists: A guide for journalism teachers in the Arab States.: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248297.

12 Posetti, J & McHugh, S (2017) *Transforming legacy print journalism into a successful podcast format: An ethnographic study of The Age's Phoebe's Fall.* Peer reviewed conference paper presented at the International Association of Media and Communications Researchers conference in Cartagena, Colombia 18/07/2017

13 An interesting example is this clip from hashtag our stories: https://www.facebook.com/hashtagoursa/videos/679504652440492/.

TRUTH, TRUST AND JOURNALISM: WHY IT MATTERS

Cherilyn Ireton

MODULE 1

Synopsis

In many parts of the world, trust in media and journalism was fragile and weakening long before the advent of social media[1]. This trend is not separate from declining trust in institutions which has been a feature common in many societies. However, the sheer volume and reach of disinformation and misinformation, dressed up as news and distributed via social media, has inflicted a contagion that threatens further reputational damage to journalism. This has implications for journalists, news media, citizens and open societies[2].

In the high-speed information free-for-all on social media platforms and the internet, everyone can be a publisher. As a result, citizens struggle to discern what is true and what is false. Cynicism and distrust rule. Extreme views, conspiracy theories and populism flourish and once-accepted truths and institutions are questioned. In this world, newsrooms battle to claim and perform their historic role as gatekeepers[3] whose product can help to establish the truth. At the same time, the rise of marketplaces for "strategic communications" and "information operations", including active disinformation and mal-information, has become a major factor in the information ecosystem.[4]

> *As the scale and consequences of 'information disorder' for society have begun to materialise, even the architects of social media are concerned. Facebook's Product Manager Civic Engagement, Samidh Chakrabarti offered: "If there's one fundamental truth about social media's impact on democracy it's that it amplifies human intent — both good and bad. At its best, it allows us to express ourselves and take action. At its worst, it allows people to spread misinformation and corrode democracy".*[5]

It has become clear that to tackle the problem, interventions, both big and small, are needed. One temptation is to try to fix the problem through regulation, and many countries are choosing this route[6], but freedom of expression advocates warn that this could hurt the openness and participation that new technologies have enabled.[7]

1 Edelman. (2017). Edelman Trust Barometer - Global Results. [online]. Available at: https://www.edelman.com/global-results/.

2 Viner, K. (2017). *A mission for journalism in a time of crisis.* [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/16/a-mission-for-journalism-in-a-time-of-crisis.

3 Singer, J. (2013). User-generated visibility: Secondary gatekeeping in a shared media space. *New Media & Society*, [online] 16(1), pp.55-73. Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0d59/6a002c26a74cd45e15fbc20e64173cf2f912.pdf.

4 See for example the cases described in Gu, L; Kropotov, V and Yarochkin, F. (nd). *The Fake News Machine How Propagandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public.* https://documents.trendmicro.com/assets/white_papers/wp-fake-news-machine-how-propagandists-abuse-the-internet.pdf. Another study is published by the Data & Society Research Institute, New York (2017) Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online, https://datasociety.net/output/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/.

5 Chakrabarti, S. (2018). *Hard Questions: What Effect Does Social Media Have on Democracy?* Facebook Newsroom. [online] Newsroom. fb.com. Available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/effect-social-media-democracy/.

6 Funke, D. (2018) *A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world* Poynter https://www.poynter.org/news/guide-anti-misinformation-actions-around-world.

7 Nossel, S. (2017). *Faking News: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth*. [ebook] PEN America. Available at: https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2017_Faking-News-11.2.pdf.

Particularly if authoritarian-minded leaders come to office, they will find a powerful and ready legal weapon at hand to determine what is "fake" and what is not regarding any critical coverage of their performance.

Another option is that proposed by civil society and company initiatives, which focus on making audiences savvier and providing them with tools to interpret and evaluate the information they receive. From South Africa[8] to Mexico[9], examples abound. Fact-checking organisations are proliferating (as explained in this handbook).

In this context, journalists and student journalists need to know about such initiatives – and about the complementary roles they can play. Hence this handbook.

For journalists, who have long regarded themselves as essential support players in democratic and open societies, disinformation and misinformation challenge more than their reputation. 'Information disorder' questions their purpose and effectiveness. It highlights the fundamental importance of the need for independence of journalism and high professional standards. This is not to assume that journalism is free of dominant ideology or bias born of gender, ethnicity, linguistic grouping, class etc. or background of those who produce it. Nor does it ignore the systemic issues of the influence of institutional contexts of ownership, business models, audience interests, the news "net" of predictable bureaucratic and public relations sources, etc. However, it is to uphold the importance of editorial ethics as a beacon for coverage, and for self-reflection by journalists about their worldviews and contexts. It is to signal that journalism is not a "view from nowhere", but a practice that needs transparency if the public is to trust that there is compliance with broad standards of verifiability and public interest, no matter the range of subjects covered and perspectives entailed.[10]

In this lesson, instructors should encourage participants to consider critically how journalism can serve society and democracy; how 'information disorder' is affecting - and risks further affecting - democracy and open societies; how journalism can do better and, in the process, rebuild trust that its methods and standards do indeed stand out as distinctive with regard to generating verifiable information in the public interest. This is not about blind trust in purveyors of journalism, but about recognising their character and distinctiveness, and aspiration for alignment with processes and standards of verified information in the public interest, and assessing them accordingly. This implies

8 #KnowNews is a web browser extension developed by South Africa's Media Monitoring Africa NGO, which seeks to help audiences identify if the site they are browsing contains credible news: https://chrome.google.com/webstore/search/KnowNews.

9 See the website https://verificado.mx/ representing a coalition of 60 media, civil society and university institutions focusing on verification of contested content during the 2018 Mexican election; https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/media-collaboration-and-citizen-input-fueled-verificado-2018s-fact-checking-of-mexican-elections/.

10 See Rosen, J. (2010). The View from Nowhere: Questions and Answers. *PressThink.* http://pressthink.org/2010/11/the-view-from-nowhere-questions-and-answers/.

recognising the value of scepticism, as opposed to cynicism, and a corresponding ability of members of the public to distinguish between those masquerading as journalism practitioners, and those who genuinely strive to do journalism (and who manifest the requisite transparency, self-regulatory accountability, and quality reputation that goes with this). For journalists and journalism students, it means understanding the changing information environment and how to respond to the challenges.

Outline

To understand the consequences of 'information disorder' for journalists, and the societies they serve, it is important that participants consider the profound change for journalism and legacy media, at a structural, cultural and normative level, that has followed the rapid advance in digital technology and Internet-enabled personal devices. Most important is the relationship between the accelerated problems of trust in journalism and engagement with social media.[11]

To blame all of journalism's woes on social media would be incorrect. Trust is directly linked to journalistic capacity – and there is also a correlation with diminishing trust in governments, business and institutions in many parts of the world.[12]

The structural changes to the way news is collected and distributed, and the collapse of legacy news companies' main business model, have denuded the news industry of journalistic capacity in newsrooms, affecting the depth, breadth and quality of news coverage.[13] Declining funds for public media newsrooms and continued governmental control in much of this sector have also weakened news offerings.

While digital transformation brought welcome new ways of storytelling and greater involvement of the audience in the news process, so too, it brought greater challenges for already weakened legacy news producers. Digital-only news organisations, generally, have not yet developed the journalistic mass to stop the degradation of journalism.[14]

In the democratised, more diverse information ecosystem, preventing the harmful effects of disinformation and misinformation is proving a challenge, not just to those invested in journalism, but to all of society.[15]

Pre-digital journalistic practice and method included professional standards, and layers

11 See Module Three

12 Edelman. (2017) op cit

13 See Module Three

14 Greenspon, E. (2017). *The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age*. [ebook] Ottowa: Public Policy Forum, Canada. Available at: https://ppforum.ca/publications/shattered-mirror-news-democracy-trust-digital-age/.

15 Ansip, A. (2017). *Hate speech, populism and fake news on social media – towards an EU response*. https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/it/video/hate-speech-populism-and-fake-news-on-social-media--towards-an-eu-response-extracts-from-the-debate_I136357.

of centralised checks and controls to manage the accuracy, quality and fairness of news. Field reporters were backed by a newsroom team who verified content before it was published. This 'gatekeeper' model instilled a sense of professionalism in journalists.[16]

Through coverage of public affairs and community issues, investigations, commentary and analysis, journalists had effective tools for holding politicians and officials to account. They helped citizens make choices about how they were governed and ruled. To be sure, some news media institutions have not lived up to the ideals and standards of journalism. But, generally, their business has been centred on real news, selected and presented in a particular interested narrative indeed, but far from made-up facts created for political, commercial or entertainment purposes.

At a cultural level, the empowerment of other actors to witness, record, comment and publish news on social media channels forced change not only to the centralised model – but also to public-square debates.[17] Social media platforms are now the key infrastructure for public and political discourse. Some argue that this has put democracies and open societies into a 'democratic deficit'.[18]

By insisting they are not news publishers, the technology companies and social platforms have sidestepped the normative obligations to which journalists and publishers are held accountable.[19] While these actors do not employ journalists to produce news, their curation and editing significance are increasingly distancing them from the role of being 'mere conduits' or simple intermediaries.

Driving much of the disinformation and misinformation, or "junk" as the Oxford Institute for Computational Science calls it, are the social media platforms and search engines' algorithms. By tapping into the family and friends' networks of the user, they provide structure and legitimacy to disinformation and misinformation.[20]

Thus, the intentionally misleading content spread on these platforms is affecting citizens' understanding of reality[21] and undermining trust, informed dialogue, a shared sense of reality, mutual consent, and participation.[22] Other ways in which social media is accused of undermining democracy include:

16 Kovach, B. and Rosenstiel, T. (2010). *Blur: How To Know What's True In The Age of Information Overload*. 1st ed. New York: Bloomsbury, pp.171-184.

17 Nossel, S. (2017). *Faking News: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth.* [ebook] PEN America. Available at: https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2017_Faking-News-11.2.pdf.

18 Howard, P. (2017) Ibid

19 Howard, P. (2017) Ibid. See also Module Three

20 Pariser, E. (2011). The filter bubble: what the Internet is hiding from you. London, Viking/Penguin Press.

21 European Commission (2017). Next steps against fake news: Commission sets up High-Level Expert Group and launches public consultation. [online] Available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-4481_en.htm.

22 Deb, A., Donohue, S. & Glaisyer, T. (2017). *Is Social Media A Threat To Democracy?* [ebook] Omidyar Group. Available at: https://gijn.org/stories/is-social-media-a-threat-to-democracy/.

- Creating echo chambers, polarisation and hyper-partisanship
- Converting popularity into legitimacy
- Allowing manipulation by populist leaders, governments and fringe actors
- Encouraging personal data capture and targeted micro-messaging/ advertising below the radar[23]
- Disrupting the public square.[24]

It does not have to be this way. Social media can be a major platform to engage society with journalism and to promote debate, civic values, and democratic participation in an environment that strengthens human rights, cultural diversity, science, knowledge and rational decision-making. To this end, journalism – on any platform – should, for example, report complex issues to the general public without losing scientific accuracy and without simplifying context that could mislead the public. Especially in the field of advanced medical treatment (e.g. cloning) and new scientific advances (e.g. artificial intelligence), challenges for journalists are to verify accuracy, avoid sensationalism, be cautious about reporting future impact, and be able to digest and balance different views or findings of credible experts.

Then there are the many ways that journalism can respond directly to disinformation and misinformation. These include resisting manipulation, through to investigating and direct exposing disinformation campaigns. But these have to be accompanied by major efforts to improve journalism in general (see below).

Societal responses to 'information disorder' and challenges thrown up by social media platforms are varied and take place on multiple levels. Solutions are evolving – some rapidly. Many originate in the U .S., where the social media companies and Google are headquartered. Some evolving tech-related initiatives to address misinformation include:

- A commitment to engineering out of search results and news feeds what the company (not without controversy) deems to be fraudulent news[25] [26] [27]

23 Cadwalladr, C. and Graham-Harrison, E. (2018). How Cambridge Analytica turned Facebook 'likes' into a lucrative political tool. The Guardian. [online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/2017/facebook-cambridge-analytica-kogan-data-algorithm.

24 Deb, A., Donohue, S. & Glaisyer, T. (2017) Ibid

25 Ling, J. (2017). *Eric Schmidt Says Google News Will 'Engineer' Russian Propaganda Out of the Feed.* Motherboard Vice.com. [online] Available at: https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/pa39vv/eric-schmidt-says-google-news-will-delist-rt-sputnik-russia-fake-news?utm_campaign=buffer&utm_content=buffer41cba&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com+Motherboard; https://www.rt.com/news/411081-google-russia-answer-rt/

26 Mosseri, A. (2018). *Helping ensure news on Facebook is from trusted sources.* Facebook. https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/trusted-sources/.

27 Stamos, A. (2018) *Authenticity matters: Why IRA has no place on Facebook.* Facebook. https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/authenticity-matters/.

- Starving disinformation providers of click-driven advertising revenue[28]
- Providing tech-driven solutions for verifying digital content and images[29]
- Funding of supportive journalism initiatives that are at the intersection of journalism, technology and academic research [30]
- The development and use of technical standards, or trust signals, to help consumers (and algorithms) identify news emanating from credible providers.[31]

At the time of writing at the start of 2018, one of the most significant of the technical standards initiatives for news organisations was The Trust Project, a consortium that works hand-in-hand with the big search engines, social media platforms and over 70 media companies around the world. Its mission is to make it easy for the public to identify news that is "accurate, accountable and ethically produced" by recognition of a trust mark. It has created eight initial technical standards[32] that a news provider should satisfy and make easily identifiable within their online design environment in order to be considered a trustworthy provider. The Trust Project's Trust Indicators[33] are:

- **Best Practices:**
  - What are your standards?
  - Who funds the news outlet?
  - What is the outlet's mission?
  - Commitments to ethics, diverse voices, accuracy, making corrections and other standards.
- **Author/Reporter Expertise:** Who made this? Details about the journalist, including their expertise and other stories they have worked on.
- **Type of Work:** What is this? Labels to distinguish opinion, analysis and advertiser (or sponsored/'native') content from news reports.
- **Citations and References:** For investigative or in-depth stories, access to the sources behind the facts and assertions.
- **Methods:** Also for in-depth stories, information about why reporters chose to pursue a story and how they went about the process (this aids transparency).

28 Love, J. & Cooke, C. (2017). *Google, Facebook move to restrict ads on fake news sites*. Reuters. [online] Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-alphabet-advertising/google-facebook-move-to-restrict-ads-on-fake-news-sites-idUSKBN1392MM.

29 See Module Six. An example is http://www.truly.media/.

30 See Module Five

31 The Trust Project (2017). *The Trust Project – News with Integrity*. [online] Available at: https://thetrustproject.org/?nr=0.

32 The Trust Project (2017). Ibid

33 The Trust Project (2017). Ibid

- **Locally Sourced?** Lets you know when the story has local origin or expertise. Was the reporting done on the scene, with deep knowledge about the local situation or community?
- **Diverse Voices:** A newsroom's efforts and commitment to bringing in diverse perspectives. (Readers/viewers/listeners notice when certain voices, ethnicities, or political persuasions are missing)
- **Actionable Feedback:** A newsroom's efforts to engage the public's help in setting coverage priorities, contributing to the reporting process, ensuring accuracy and other areas. Readers/viewers/listeners want to participate and provide feedback that might alter or expand a story.

Trust in journalistic work also helps increase the number, diversity, and quality of sources available to journalists, with flow-on effects for audiences.

Governments, civil society and educators' responses include a greater focus on media and information literacy, dealt with in more detail in a later lesson[34].

These points were also taken up in 2017 by the World Editors Forum, whose President, Marcelo Rech, proposed that editors worldwide embrace the following five principles[35]:

- In a world of hyper-information, credibility, independence, accuracy, professional ethics, transparency and pluralism are the **values** that will confirm **a relationship of trust** with the public.
- Next-level journalism is **distinguished** from other content by the vigilant and diligent **questioning and verification** of material circulating on social media. It acknowledges social media as a source of information for further fact-checking and as a platform for leveraging professional content.
- The **mission** of journalism at this next level is to **serve society** by providing high-quality verified information and to establish news brands as a trusted certificate of origin for content.
- A **requirement** of next-level journalism is that it **goes beyond basic facts** and enables and encourages analysis, contextual and investigative reporting, and informed expression of opinion, moving from the provision of news to knowledge that empowers.
- Next-level journalism should be driven by trust and the guiding **principles of social relevance, legitimate interest and truthfulness.**

34 See Module Four

35 Ireton, C. (2016). *World Editors Forum asks editors to embrace 5 principles to build trust* https://www.inpublishing.co.uk/articles/world-editors-forum-approves-five-principles-4201.

For journalists and newsrooms, more attention is given to promoting quality by improving:

- Accountable, ethical journalism practices and evidence-based reporting [36]
- Fact checking and the calling out of disinformation and misinformation.[37]
- Verification of data, sources, digital images[38]
- Engagement with the communities that journalists engage and ensuring the news agenda is in tune with societies' needs.[39]

On this last bullet point above, evidence of a disconnect between much mainstream media and their publics was highlighted during the UK vote to exit the European Union, Brexit, and in the US 2016 Election. The strength of social media communication is direct engagement. Instructors should explore how media can better serve their audiences and thereby build trust, strengthening their relationship and the broader community.

Schudson's *Six or Seven Things News Can Do for Democracy*[40] provides a good framework for discussion:

1. Information: provide fair and full information so citizens can make sound political choices;
2. Investigation: investigate concentrated sources of power, particularly governmental power;
3. Analysis: provide coherent frameworks of interpretation to help citizens comprehend a complex world;
4. Social empathy: tell people about others in their society and their world so that they come to appreciate the viewpoints and lives of other people, especially those less advantaged than themselves;
5. Public forum: provide a forum for dialogue among citizens, through pluralistic and interdisciplinary approaches to issues, and serve as a common carrier of the perspectives of varied groups in society;

36 Wales, J. (2017). *What do we mean by evidence-based journalism?* Wikitribune. https://medium.com/wikitribune/what-do-we-mean-by-evidence-based-journalism-3fd7113102d3.

37 See Module Five

38 Bell, F. (2018). In an age of data-journalism, verification is all the more complex. For instance, in cases of massive data troves it is likely that not just inaccurate information exists, but also that it is entirely possible that deliberately planned disinformation may be included within the records. See also Module Six of this course

39 Batsell, J. (2015). Engaged journalism: connecting with digitally empowered news audiences. New York. Columbia University Press.

40 Schudson, M. (2008). *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*. Polity. Chapter Two: Six or Seven Things News Can Do For Democracy. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=hmYGMe9ecKUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=schduson+michael+6+or+seven+ways&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwju_%20ZGI6ozZAhWELsAKHcovBlUQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q&f=false#v=onepage&q=schduson%20michael%206%20or%20seven%20ways&f=false.

6. Mobilisation: serve (where so desired) as advocates for political programmes and perspectives and mobilise people to act in support of these programmes, without however compromising verification standards and public interest.

Module Aims

- To encourage participants to think critically about journalism and social media
- To encourage participants to assess their place within the 'information disorder' ecosystem
- To help participants to think critically about the impact of 'information disorder' on society.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, participants should have:

1. Deepened their critical understanding of how journalism can better serve democracy and open societies in a vastly expanded media environment, and the risks of 'information disorder' to democracy
2. Understood the factors that drive trust in journalism and how such trust can be sustained or rebuilt
3. Be able to explain to someone else why journalism matters.

Module Format

The information in the outline of this module could form the basis for a 30-minute lecture, coupled with a 30-minute tutorial or round-table discussion on why journalism matters and how it serves the public. A 90-minute practical exercise could, through a structured conversation, explore how sceptics who do not trust journalism, might be persuaded that not all information is equally untrustworthy; what could a news medium do to make its case for credibility within a social media environment where all information looks equal?

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A. Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Lecture and interactive discussion on truth and trust	30 mins	1, 2
Round-table discussion on why journalism matters and how it serves the public	30 mins	1, 2, 3

B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Practical exercise	90 mins	3

Suggested Assignment

The assignment has three elements and requires participants to work in pairs or small groups:

- Ask participants (working in small groups or pairs) to interview a news consumer and ask them to identify their most trusted sources of local or national news and civic information. Using Schudson's model of "Six or Seven Things News Can Do for Democracy" as a frame, they should then study a single edition of a publication, or themed stories in the named media, to identify and analyse how effectively these are serving their community through their journalism. Content Analysis techniques would be a useful methodology for this approach. A secondary element will be to identify which, if any, of the Trust Project's eight trust indicators can be identified. Thirdly, the findings could form the basis for a news report or editorial comment - in writing, or as a short video or audio story which makes a case for why journalism matters.

Reading

Deb, A., Donohue, S. & Glaisyer, T. (2017). *Is Social Media A Threat To Democracy?* [ebook] Omidyar Group. Available at: https://gijn.org/stories/is-social-media-a-threat-to-democracy/

Edelman. (2017). *2017 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER - Global Results*. [online] Available at: https://www.edelman.com/global-results/

Howard, P. (2017) *Is social media killing democracy?* Oxford. Available at https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/videos/is-social-media-killing-democracy-computational-propaganda-algorithms-automation-and-public-life/

Nossel, S. (2017). *FAKING NEWS: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth*. [ebook] PEN America. Available at: https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2017_Faking-News-11.2.pdf

Schudson, M. (2008). *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*. Polity. Chapter 5: Six or Seven Things News can do for Democracies, Available at https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=hmYGMe9ecKUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=schduson+michael+6+or+seven+ways&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwju_%20ZGI6ozZAhWELsAKHc0vBlUQ6AEIKTAA%E2%80%93v=onepage&q&f=false%23v=onepage&q=schduson%20michael%206%20or%20seven%20ways&f=false#v=onepage&q=schduson%20michael%206%20or%20seven%20ways&f=false

Viner, K. (2017). *A mission for journalism in a time of crisis*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/16/a-mission-for-journalism-in-a-time-of-crisis

THINKING ABOUT 'INFORMATION DISORDER': FORMATS OF MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND MAL-INFORMATION

Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan

MODULE 2

Synopsis

There have been many uses of the term 'fake news' and even 'fake media' to describe reporting with which the claimant does not agree. A Google Trends map shows that people began searching for the term extensively in the second half of 2016.[1] *In this module participants will learn why that term is a) inadequate for explaining the scale of information pollution, and b) why the term has become so problematic that we should avoid using it.*

Unfortunately, the phrase is inherently vulnerable to being politicised and deployed as a weapon against the news industry, as a way of undermining reporting that people in power do not like. Instead, it is recommended to use the terms misinformation and disinformation. This module will examine the different types that exist and where these types sit on the spectrum of 'information disorder'.

This covers satire and parody, click-bait headlines, and the misleading use of captions, visuals or statistics, as well as the genuine content that is shared out of context, imposter content (when a journalist's name or a newsroom logo is used by people with no connections to them), and manipulated and fabricated content. From all this, it emerges that this crisis is much more complex than the term 'fake news' suggests.

If we want to think about solutions to these types of information polluting our social media streams and stopping them from flowing into traditional media outputs, we need to start thinking about the problem much more carefully. We also need to think about the people who are creating this type of content, and what is motivating them to do this. What types of content are they producing, and how are they being received by audiences? And when those same audience members decide to re-share those posts, what's motivating them to do that? There are many aspects to this issue, and many of the debates are not grasping this complexity. By the end of this module, learners should feel able to use terminology and definitions that are appropriate for discussing the problems associated with 'information disorder'.

Outline

This handbook generally uses the terms "disinformation" and "misinformation" to contrast with the verifiable information, in the public interest, which is what authentic journalism gives rise to. In this module, focus is put on the distinctiveness of disinformation.

Much of the discourse on 'fake news' conflates two notions: misinformation and disinformation. It can be helpful, however, to propose that misinformation is information

1 Google Trend Map of the term *Fake News* https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&q=fake%20news.

that is false, but the person who is disseminating it believes that it is true. Disinformation is information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false. It is a deliberate, intentional lie, and points to people being actively disinformed by malicious actors.[2]

A third category could be termed mal-information; information, that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country. An example is a report that reveals a person's sexual orientation without public interest justification. It is important to distinguish messages that are true from those that are false, but also those that are true (and those messages with some truth) but which are created, produced or distributed by "agents" who intend to harm rather than serve the public interest. Such mal-information – like true information that violates a person's privacy without public interest justification - goes against the standards and ethics of journalism.

Notwithstanding the distinctions above, the consequences on the information environment and society may be similar (e.g. corrupting the integrity of democratic process, reducing vaccination rates). In addition, particular cases may exhibit combinations of these three conceptualisations, and there is evidence that individual examples of one are often accompanied by the others (e.g. on different platforms or in sequence) as part of a broader information strategy by particular actors. Nevertheless, it is helpful to keep the distinctions in mind because the causes, techniques and remedies can vary accordingly.

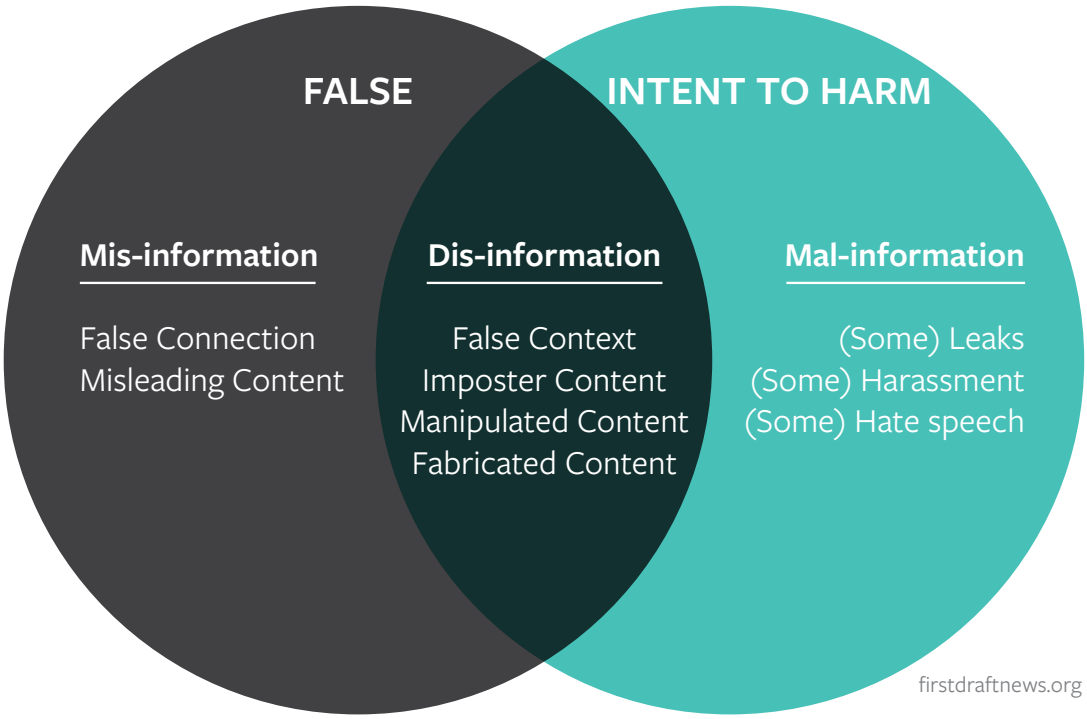

Figure 1: 'Information disorder'

The 2017 French presidential election provided examples that illustrate all three types of 'information disorder'.

2 Further insight into definitions can be observed in the study by Karlova and Fisher (2012).

1. Examples of disinformation:

One of the attempted hoaxes of the French election campaign, was the creation of a sophisticated duplicate version of the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*[3] with a false article claiming that the presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron was being funded by Saudi Arabia. Another example was the circulation of documents online claiming falsely that he had opened an offshore bank account in the Bahamas.[4] And finally, disinformation circulated via 'Twitter raids' in which loosely connected networks of individuals simultaneously took to Twitter with identical hashtags and messages to spread rumours about the candidate's personal life.

2. Examples of misinformation:

A terror attack on the Champs Elysees in Paris on 20 April 2017 inspired a great deal of misinformation[5] as is the case in almost all breaking news situations. Individuals on social media unwittingly published a number of rumours, including the news that a second policeman had been killed, for example. The people sharing this type of content are rarely doing so to cause harm. Rather, they are caught up in the moment, trying to be helpful, but fail to adequately inspect and verify the information they are sharing.

3. Examples of mal-information:

One striking example of mal-information occurred when Emmanuel Macron's emails were leaked just before the run-off vote on 7 May. The emails were regarded as genuine. However, by releasing private information into the public sphere minutes before the standard electoral ban on any coverage immediately ahead of polling, the leak was designed to cause maximum harm to the Macron campaign.

The term propaganda is not synonymous with disinformation, although disinformation can serve the interests of propaganda. But propaganda is usually more overtly manipulative than disinformation, typically because it traffics in emotional rather than informational messaging.[6]

In this module, we concentrate on misinformation and particularly disinformation, and share some examples of further different types.

The categories of disinformation, misinformation and mal-informatation outlined above should not be conflated with different orientations with genuine news narratives.

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3 CrossCheck, 2017. *Was Macron's campaign for French Presidency financed by Saudi Arabia?*: Available at https://crosscheck.firstdraftnews.org/checked-french/macrons-campaign-french-presidency-financed-saudi-arabia/.

4 CrossCheck, 2017. *Did Emmanuel Macron Open an Offshore Account?* CrossCheck, Available at https://crosscheck.firstdraftnews.org/checked-french/emmanuel-macron-open-offshore-account/.

5 One example was the rumour that Muslims in the UK celebrated the attack. This was debunked by the CrossCheck project: CrossCheck, (April 22, 2017) *Did London Muslims 'celebrate' a terrorist attack on the Champs-Elysees?* CrossCheck, Available at https://crosscheck.firstdraftnews.org/checked-french/london-muslims-celebrate-terrorist-attack-champs-elysees/.

6 Neale, S. (1977). Propaganda. *Screen* 18-3, pp 9-40

For example, one journalist may write, "While not in the league of Bernie Madoff, the alleged fraud in this new case has hit small investors hard". Another writer could legitimately put it the other way around: "The alleged fraud in this new case has hit small investors hard, but it is not in the league of Bernie Madoff". The second phrasing does more to minimise the comparative significance of the new case. The matter of differing emphasis in these examples does not per se amount to perpetuating misinformation or disinformation in the senses described below. These could be two legitimate ways of interpreting the same situation.

The point is that narrative is present in news, as well as in disinformation, misinformation and mal-information. Thus narrative is embedded in what facts are selected as salient in the news (or in what facts are made up or taken out of context in toxic communications). A news report on crime, that is not disinformation or its cousins, may see it as relevant to mention the presumed race or nationality of a perpetrator and victim. It may be a fact that an alleged mugger is a migrant and a male, and the apparent victim a national who is female; whether any of that is actually salient to the story, however, is a function of investigative power of the journalist, and particularly part of the ideology, perspective and narrative of significance and causality that the reporter consciously or unconsciously puts 'on the table'. This is one reason why "fact-checking" can be profitably accompanied by "narrative unpacking" – examining the structures of meaning within which facts and non-facts are mobilised for particular purposes. Narratives within legitimate journalism may vary, and their existence does not mean that journalism loses its distinctiveness when compared to narratives in other forms of communication, such as the seven listed below:

1. Satire and Parody

Including satire in a typology about disinformation and misinformation, is perhaps surprising. Satire and parody could be considered as a form of art. However, in a world where people increasingly receive information via their social feeds, there has been confusion when it is not understood a site is satirical. An example is from *The Khabaristan Times*, a satirical column and site that were part of the news site *Pakistan Today.* [7] In January 2017, the site was blocked in Pakistan and therefore stopped publishing.[8]

7 Pakistan Today (2018). *Anthropologists make contact with remote cut-off tribe still thanking Raheel Sharif.* [online] p.Khabaristan Today. Available at: https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/01/11/anthropologists-make-contact-with-remote-cut-off-tribe-still-thanking-raheel-sharif/.

8 Among the resources for consultation here is one written by co-editor of this book, Julie Posetti, along with Alice Mathews.

2. False Connection

When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content, this is an example of false connection. The most common example of this type of content is clickbait headlines. With the increased competition for audience attention, editors increasingly have to write headlines to attract clicks, even if when people read the article they feel that they have been deceived. A particularly egregious example can be found on *The Political Insider* website[9]. This can also happen when visuals or captions are used, particularly on sites like Facebook, to give a certain impression, which is not backed up by the text. But when people scroll through feeds on their social accounts without clicking through to articles (which often happens), misleading visuals and captions can be especially deceptive.

3. Misleading Content

This type of content is when there is a misleading use of information to frame issues or individuals in certain ways by cropping photos, or choosing quotes or statistics selectively. This is called Framing Theory[10]. Some examples have been exposed on Rappler.com.[11] Visuals are particularly powerful vehicles for disseminating misleading information, as our brains are less likely to be critical of visuals.[12] "Native' or paid advertising that mimics editorial content also falls into this category when it is insufficiently identified as sponsored.[13]

4. False Context

One of the reasons the term 'fake news' is so unhelpful, is because genuine content is often seen being re-circulated out of its original context. For example, an image from Vietnam, captured in 2007, re-circulated seven years later, was shared under the guise that it was a photograph from Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2015.[14]

5. Imposter Content

There are real issues with journalists having their bylines used alongside articles they did not write, or organisations' logos used in videos or images that they did not create. For example, ahead of the Kenyan elections in 2017, *BBC Africa* found out that someone had created a video with a photoshopped BBC logo and strap line, and it was circulating

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9 The Political Insider (2015). *First time voter waited 92 years to meet Trump... what happened next is AMAZING*! [online] Available at: https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-inspired-92-year-woman-register-vote/story?id=35245524.

10 Entman, R., Matthes, J. and Pellicano, L. (2009). Nature, sources, and effects of news framing. In: K. Wahl-Jorgensen and T. Hanitzsch (Contributor), ed., *Handbook of Journalism studies*. [online] New York: Routledge, pp.196-211. Available at: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203877685-22/nature-sources-effects-news-framing-robert-entman-j%C3%B6rg-matthes-lynn-pellicano.

11 Punongbayan, J. (2017). *Has change really come? Misleading graphs and how to spot them*. Rappler.com. [online] Available at: https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/20177731-duterte-change-fake-news-graphs-spot.

12 See article by Hannah Guy in required reading section of this lesson

13 See Module Three

14 Pham, N. (2018). *Haunting 'Nepal quake victims photo' from Vietnam.* BBC. [online] Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-32579598.

on *WhatsApp*.[15] They therefore had to make a video that they shared on social media, warning people not to be fooled by the fabricated video.

6. Manipulated Content

Manipulated content is when genuine content is manipulated to deceive. An example from South Africa shows manipulated images of HuffPost Editor-at-Large Ferial Haffajee – in one case, sitting on the lap of a businessman, Johan Rupert – imputing a personal relationship with him.[16]

7. Fabricated Content

This type of content can be text format, such as the completely fabricated 'news sites', like WTOE5 News, the self-proclaimed fantasy news site which published an article suggesting that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump for President. Or it can be visual, as was the case when a graphic was created which incorrectly suggested that people could vote for Hillary Clinton via SMS[17]. These graphics targeted minority communities on social networks in the lead up to the Presidential election in the USA.

The public in general, and journalists especially, need to separately examine the 'elements' of 'information disorder': the agent, messages and interpreters. In this matrix, there are questions that need to be asked of each element. The agent who creates a fabricated message might be different to the agent who produces that message—who might also be different from the 'agent' who distributes the message. Similarly, there is a need for a thorough understanding of who these agents are and what motivates them. The different types of messages being distributed by agents also need to be understood, so that we can start estimating the scale of each and begin addressing them. (The debate to date has been overwhelmingly focused on fabricated text news sites, but visual content is just as widespread and much harder to identify and debunk.)

Finally, there is a need to consider the three different 'phases' of 'information disorder': creation, production, and distribution (Figure 2). It is important to consider the different phases of an instance of 'information disorder' alongside its elements because the agent who masterminds the content is often separate from the producers and disseminators.

15 BBC (2017). *Kenya election: Fake CNN and BBC news reports circulate.* [Online] Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-40762796.

16 Haffajee, F. (2017). *Ferial Haffajee: The Gupta fake news factory and me.* HuffPost South Africa. [online] Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/06/05/ferial-haffajee-the-gupta-fake-news-factory-and-me_a_22126282/.

17 Haltiwanger, J. (2016). Trump Trolls Tell Hillary Clinton Supporters They Can Vote Via Text. Elite Daily. Available at https://www.elitedaily.com/news/politics/trump-trolls-hillary-clinton-voting-text-message/1680338.

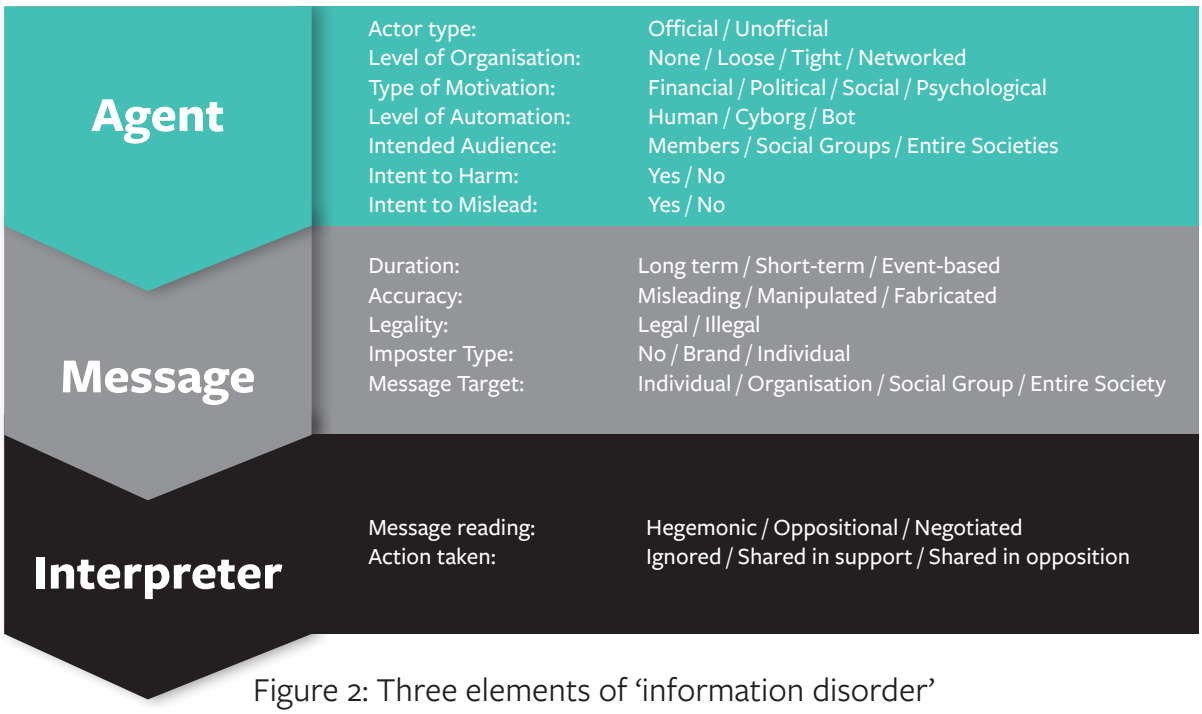
Agent
Actor type: Official / Unofficial
Level of Organisation: None / Loose / Tight / Networked
Type of Motivation: Financial / Political / Social / Psychological
Level of Automation: Human / Cyborg / Bot
Intended Audience: Members / Social Groups / Entire Societies
Intent to Harm: Yes / No
Intent to Mislead: Yes / No
Message
Duration: Long term / Short-term / Event-based
Accuracy: Misleading / Manipulated / Fabricated
Legality: Legal / Illegal
Imposter Type: No / Brand / Individual
Message Target: Individual / Organisation / Social Group / Entire Society
Interpreter
Message reading: Hegemonic / Oppositional / Negotiated
Action taken: Ignored / Shared in support / Shared in opposition

Figure 2: Three elements of 'information disorder'

For example, the motivations of the mastermind who 'creates' a state-sponsored disinformation campaign are very different from those of the low-paid 'trolls' tasked with turning the campaign's themes into specific posts. And once a message has been distributed, it can be reproduced and redistributed endlessly, by many different actors, all with different motivations. For example, a social media post can be distributed by several communities, leading its message to be picked up and reproduced by the mainstream media (operating without sufficient scrutiny) and further distributed to still other communities. Only by dissecting 'information disorder' in this manner can we begin to understand these nuances.[18]

18 Note from the Editors: A further graphic that may be considered is reproduced below:

	Actors: Governments, psy-ops, political parties, entrepreneurs, PR firms, individuals, media	**Software enablement**
Create content – eg. stories, comments, "likes", videos, memes.	Often with concealed or stolen or false ID	Interactive interfaces
Circulate content such as by sharing and linking	Harnessing bots to help	Bots
"Edit" content: alter/ amend, moderate & curate	Hacking and gaming	Algorithms

Table: Framework for toxicity – how the integrity of information can be corrupted

The example of the site that published a viral story that the Pope endorsed presidential candidate Donald Trump is one of the most famous.[19] It is a useful case study for thinking about the different phases of 'information disorder' (See Figure 3).

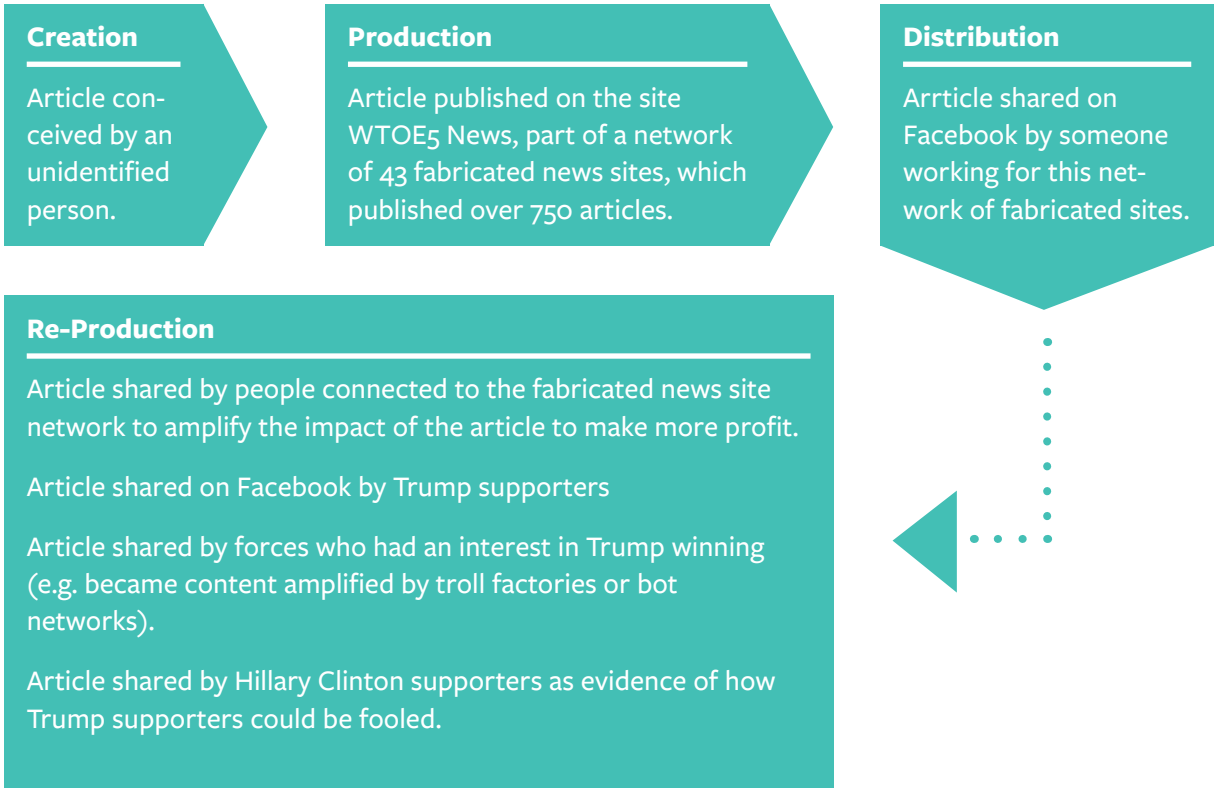
Creation
Article conceived by an unidentified person.
Production
Article published on the site WTOE5 News, part of a network of 43 fabricated news sites, which published over 750 articles.
Distribution
Arrticle shared on Facebook by someone working for this network of fabricated sites.
Re-Production
Article shared by people connected to the fabricated news site network to amplify the impact of the article to make more profit.
Article shared on Facebook by Trump supporters
Article shared by forces who had an interest in Trump winning (e.g. became content amplified by troll factories or bot networks).
Article shared by Hillary Clinton supporters as evidence of how Trump supporters could be fooled.

Figure 3: Phases of 'information disorder'

Module Aims

- To be a more discerning consumer of information found online, by thinking about the broad spectrum of disinformation and misinformation.
- To think critically about the (often anonymous or imposter) people who create these types of information, what formats it takes, how it may be interpreted and how it spreads.
- To understand the complexities of 'information disorder', particularly the need to differentiate between those who create these types of information, the formats they use and the way that audiences may share those messages.
- To be able to consider the difficulties we have in terms of addressing the challenges of disinformation and misinformation.
- To underline the issue of how the 'information disorder' affects democracies and open societies – the subject of the previous module.

19 WTOE 5News (2016). *Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for President, releases statement*. [online]

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

1. Appreciate the ways in which this topic has been discussed and shaped by politicians, the news media and academics.
2. Understand how harm and falsity are ways of thinking about 'information disorder'.
3. Understand the types of misinformation and disinformation and apply them to different examples.
4. Think critically about an example of disinformation, breaking down who initiated and/or created it, what the message looked like and how it might have been interpreted by audiences.
5. Explain to someone else why it is important that we think about this issue carefully.

Module Format

Theoretical Lecture & Practical Workshop:

The slides for this Module[20] are designed to support a longer-form interactive workshop.

However, for the purpose of this curriculum, the text above is suggested as the basis for a theoretical lecture. The practical exercises contained within the slides have been extracted for a 90-minute tutorial. Educators should work through the slides, using the discussion questions and exercises.

Exercise 1: Look at Figure 4 below, which explains '7 types of disinformation and misinformation'. In pairs or small groups, participants can be asked to provide examples that fit into these categories.

20 Slides available to download at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/fake_news_syllabus_-_model_course_1_-_slide_deck.pdf

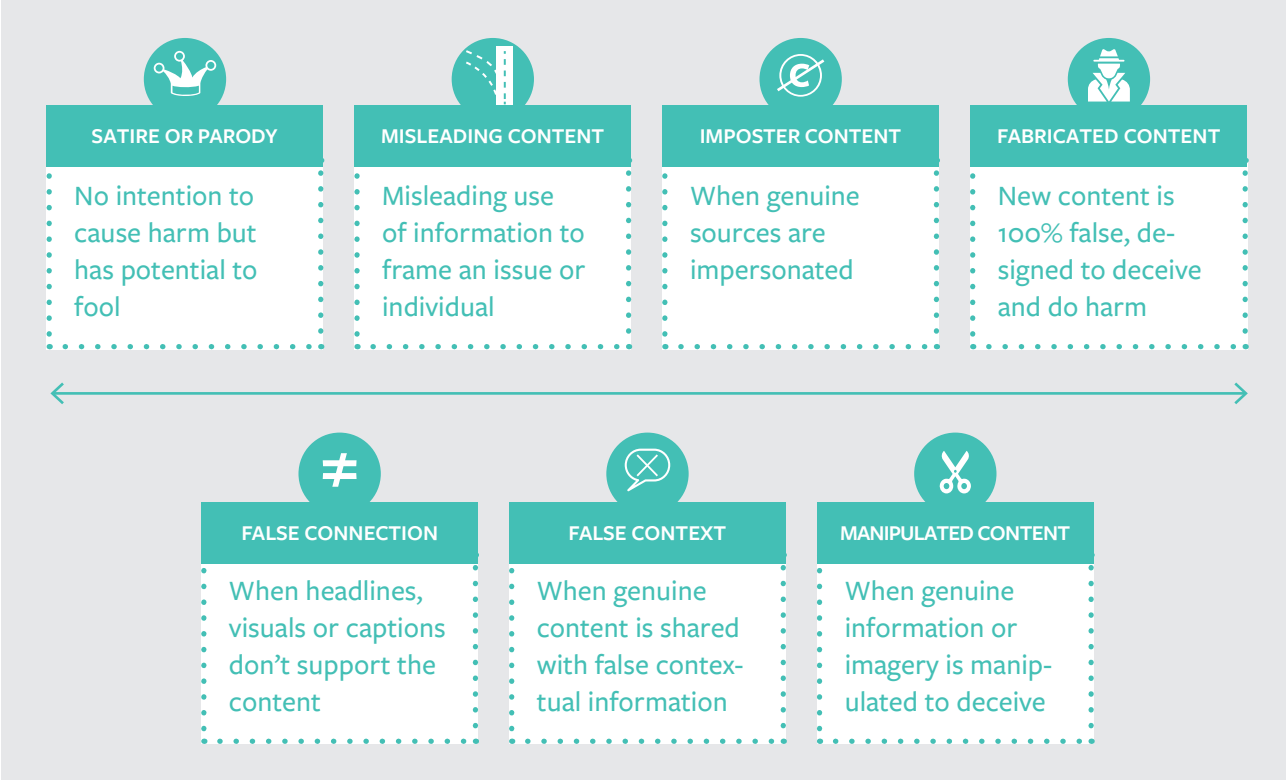
SATIRE OR PARODY
No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool
MISLEADING CONTENT
Misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual
IMPOSTER CONTENT
When genuine sources are impersonated
FABRICATED CONTENT
New content is 100% false, de-signed to deceive and do harm
FALSE CONNECTION
When headlines, visuals or captions don't support the content
FALSE CONTEXT
When genuine content is shared with false contex-tual information
MANIPULATED CONTENT
When genuine information or imagery is manip-ulated to deceive

Figure 4: Seven categories of 'information disorder' - *firstdraftnews.org*

Exercise 2: Examine the Venn diagram (Figure 1), which explains the differences between misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. Do you agree with it? What's missing? Is there anything that you would challenge?

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A. Theoretical

Lecture	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Presentation and class discussions: Sharing previous knowledge about recent cases of disinformation and misinformation	90 mins	1

B. Practical

Lecture	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Exercise 1: Look at Figure 4, which explains types of disinformation and misinformation, and in pairs or small groups, find examples that fit into these categories.	45 mins	2

Exercise 2: Examine Figure 1, which explains the differences between misinformation, disinformation and 'malinformation'. Do you agree with it? What's missing? Is there anything that you would challenge?	45 mins	3

Suggested Assignment

Create a storyboard[21] for an explanatory video that a social media company could run at the top of the Newsfeed to educate their users about what they should watch out for when they are consuming information on the site. Participants could include examples of disinformation and misinformation that they have encountered in the course of this module to highlight the risks of simply 'liking', 'sharing', and commenting on posts where the reader has not ascertained whether it is likely to be true or not. A simple storyboarding tool can be found here: http://www.storyboardthat.com/

Materials

Slides: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/fake_news_syllabus_-_model_course_1_-_slide_deck.pdf

Reading

Berger, G. 2017. Fake news and the future of professional and ethical journalism. Presentation at conference organized by the Joint Extremism/Digital Europe Working Group Conference of the European Parliament on 6 September 2017.

Busby, M. I. Khan & E. Watling (2017) *Types of Misinformation During the UK Election*, First Draft News, Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/misinfo-types-uk-election/

Guy, H. (2017) *Why we need to understand misinformation through visuals*, First Draft News, Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/understanding-visual-misinfo/

21 Note: Storyboarding is the creative planning process used in advertising, film, documentary-making and journalism that presents a frame-by-frame pictorial representation of the flow of text, video or audio content

Karlova, N.A. and Fisher, K.E. (2012) "Plz RT": A Social Diffusion Model of Misinformation and Disinformation for Understanding Human Information Behaviour. Proceedings of the ISIC2012 (Tokyo). Available at https://www.academia.edu/1981610/_Plz_RT_A_social_diffusion_model_of_misinformation_and_disinformation_for_understanding_human_information_behaviour

Silverman, C. (2017) *This is How your Hyperpartisan Political News Get Made*, BuzzFeed News, Available at https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-the-hyperpartisan-sausage-is-made?

Wardle, C. & H. Derakhshan (2017) *Information Disorder: Towards an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy-Making. Council of Europe.* Available at https://firstdraftnews.com/resource/coe-report/

Wardle, C. & H. Derakhshan (2017) *One year on, we're still not recognizing the complexity of information disorder online*, First Draft News, Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/coe_infodisorder/

Zuckerman, E. (2017) *Stop Saying Fake News, It's Not Helping*, My Heart's in Accra, Available at http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2017/01/30/stop-saying-fake-news-its-not-helping/

NEWS INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL PLATFORMS AND THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

Julie Posetti

MODULE 3

Synopsis

The Digital Age has been described as a 'golden era for journalism'[1]. Indeed, it has enabled access to significant data caches leading to ground-breaking investigative journalism[2], new models of cross-border collaborative reporting, and access to treasure troves of knowledge and diverse sources at a mouse-click. It has also delivered unprecedented, ongoing challenges and structural changes to the news industry. Journalism is 'under fire'[3], facing a virtual 'perfect storm' of convergent pressures that feed 'information disorder'[4]. These include:

- The rise of computational propaganda[5] and the 'weaponisation of mistrust'[6]
- The digital disruption of advertising, causing the collapse of the traditional business model for news publishing, and mass unemployment
- The failure of digital advertising to support journalism as a replacement for print advertising (Google and Facebook are now the main beneficiaries of digital advertising sales)[7]
- Digital convergence transforming content-commissioning, production, publication and distribution, significantly increasing deadline pressure and leading to additional job losses
- Targeted online harassment of journalists (particularly women), their sources and their audiences[8]
- Social media platforms placing audiences at the forefront of content discovery and distribution[9], and making them collaborators in the production

1 Posetti, J. (2017). *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age* UNESCO, Paris. p 104 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248054E.pdf. (Citing ICIJ Director, Gerard Ryle)

2 Obermayer, B. & Obermaier, F. (2016). The Panama Papers: Breaking the story of how the rich and powerful hide their money, One World, London

3 UNESCO (2018). *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* 2017/2018. UNESCO, Paris. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002597/259756e.pdf.

4 Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Council of Europe*, Op Cit. Note: the video recording of a panel discussion at the 2018 International Journalism Festival, convened by the chapter author, is a resource that instructors may wish to use for the operationalization of this module. https://www.journalismfestival.com/programme/2018/journalisms-perfect-storm-confronting-rising-global-threats-from-fke-news-to-censorship-surveillance-and-the-killing-of-journalists-with-impunity

5 Clarke, R. & Gyemisi, B. (2017). *Digging up facts about fake news: The Computational Propaganda Project.* OECD. https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/digging-up-facts-about-fake-news-the-computational-propaganda-project/.

6 UNESCO (2017). *States and journalists can take steps to counter 'fake news'.* UNESCO, Paris. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/states-and-journalists-can-take-steps-counter-fake-news.

7 Kollewe, J. (2017). *Google and Facebook bring in one-fifth of global ad revenue* The Guardian, May 2nd 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/may/02/google-and-facebook-bring-in-one-fifth-of-global-ad-revenue.

8 See Module Seven

9 Nielsen, R.K. & Schroeder, C. K. (2014). *The Relative Importance of Social Media for Accessing, Finding and Engaging With News* in Digital Journalism, 2(4) http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2013.872420.

of news (which offers many benefits but destabilises legacy news media gatekeeping power and impacts on verification standards[10])

- Audience expectations of 'on-demand' news, mobile delivery and real-time engagement on social media further increasing pressure on news professionals facing diminishing resources in a never-ending news cycle
- News publishers struggling to hold onto audiences as barriers to publication are removed, empowering any person or entity to produce content, bypass traditional gatekeepers, and compete for attention – including powerful politicians seeking to undermine the credibility of critical reporting[11]
- The limited impact and profitability of many new digital-only media start-ups filling the voids created by the failure of newspapers
- The erosion of trust in journalism and mainstream media organisations causing audiences to dissipate further, diminishing remaining profits and fuelling the spread of 'information disorder'

As a result, the lines between fact, entertainment, advertising, fabrication and fiction are increasingly blurred. And when disinformation and misinformation are published, the social news distribution system, dependent on peer-to-peer sharing, frequently sends the content viral, making it impossible to pull back, even if journalists and other fact-checkers successfully debunk it.

This module will inform participants about how the Digital Era collapse of many commercial news media business models, in combination with processes of digital transformation and the advent of social media, has enabled the legitimation and viral spread of disinformation and misinformation[12]. It will also assist participants to critically analyse the news media's responses to 'information disorder'. Additionally, it should inform participants about emerging industry good practices for managing the problem.

10 Posetti, J. & Silverman, C. (2014). When *Good People Share Bad Things: The Basics of Social Media Verification* in Posetti (Ed) Trends in Newsrooms 2014 (WAN-IFRA, Paris). http://mediashift.org/2014/07/goodwhen-good-people-share-bad-things-the-basics-of-social-media-verification/.

11 Cadwalladr, C. (2017). *Trump, Assange, Bannon, Farage... bound together in an unholy alliance,* The Guardian, October 28th 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/28/trump-assange-bannon-farage-bound-together-in-unholy-alliance.

12 Posetti, J. & Silverman, C. (2014). op cit

Outline

Teasing out the issues

Structural causes of 'information disorder' affecting the news industry

I) Collapsing traditional business models

The rapid decline of traditional advertising revenue - the funding model that supported commercial journalism for nearly two centuries - and the failure of digital advertising to generate sufficient profit have led to an era of increasingly urgent experimentation designed to make the business of journalism sustainable. However, the collapse of the news industry has only accelerated, with the sharp decline of newspapers, dramatic restructures and mass layoffs now a common cyclic experience in Digital Era newsrooms. Changing media consumer behaviours and the proliferation of social media, along with the arrival of affordable, app-enabled smartphones have also seen a bleeding of audiences from traditional news products to peer-to-peer modes of information sharing, further draining revenue.

The impacts with relevance to 'information disorder' include:

- Depletion of newsroom resources (staff and budgets), leading to less scrutiny of sources and information, and less 'on-the-ground' reporting
- Increased deadline pressure coupled with reduced quality control processes and job losses, while the demand to churn out content continues in order to feed homepages and social media channels
- Less time and resources for 'checks and balances' (including reporter fact-checking and sub-editing)
- Over-reliance on poorly identified but lucrative 'native advertising'[13] and on 'click-bait' headlines which risks further eroding audience trust

ii) Digital transformation of newsrooms and storytelling

The decade from 2000 shook much of the media world[14], disrupting patterns and processes of news creation, distribution, and consumption as the Digital Era took hold. It presented unprecedented opportunities and challenges in tandem. The digital transformation of the news industry and the craft of journalism is now understood as a perpetual process that is driven concurrently by changing audience behaviours (e.g. peer-to-peer distribution of content, on demand-access) and technology (like the

13 'Native Advertising' is a term used in the media industry to refer to paid content that mimics reportage. It is considered ethical practice to very clearly label the content as 'paid' but fear of deterring readers has resulted in an absence of transparency in some cases

14 Nielsen, R. K. (2012). *The Ten Years That Shook the Media World: Big Questions and Big Trends in International Media Developments* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford). https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-09/Nielsen%20-%20Ten%20Years%20that%20Shook%20the%20Media_0.pdf.

advent of social media platforms, the arrival of Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence and the increasing accessibility of smartphones).[15] There is, therefore, an ongoing need for digital capability-building.

The impacts relevant to 'information disorder' include:

- Media convergence: many journalists are now tasked to produce content for multiple platforms concurrently (from mobile to print), further depleting time available for proactive reportage, as distinct from reactive modes such as reproducing public relations content without adequate scrutiny
- Reporters are increasingly required to sub-edit and publish their own content without appropriate review[16]
- Digital-first deadlines are always *now*; heightening the risk of errors
- Social-first publishing is commonplace, with reporters posting their stories to their individual social media accounts and/or those of their publishers to meet audience demand for real-time news. Practices include 'live tweeting', 'Facebook Live' videos, and other journalistic acts which do not necessarily involve editorial oversight (akin to live broadcasting), potentially resulting in a 'publish first, check later' mindset
- Reliance on rudimentary data analytics that focus on the number of article clicks and unique website visitors instead of 'attention minutes' and 'time spent' (more useful markers for long-form and quality journalism) used to justify higher prices for increasingly scarce and low-rate digital advertising
- Clickbait practices (understood as the use of misleading headlines to entice readers to click on links under false pretences) designed to drive traffic but which have been associated with erosion of trust in professional journalism
- Pursuit of virality at the expense of quality and accuracy. This is a problem likely to be exacerbated by 'machine learning'
- The rise of fact-checking units within newsrooms, and as outputs of media development projects

15 For detailed global analysis of digital media trends, see the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's (RISJ) *Digital News Report.* The 2018 edition is available at: http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/overview-key-findings-2018/

16 See Australian Community Media (ACM) case study: Robin, M. (2014). *Who needs subs? Fairfax turns to reporter-only model* Crikey. https://www.crikey.com.au/2014/10/16/who-needs-subs-fairfax-turns-to-reporter-only-model/. (Note: this method is now entrenched across Fairfax Media's regional, rural and community publications)

iii) Virality: how disinformation spreads rapidly in the new news ecosystem

a) The rise of the audience

The Digital Era removed barriers to publication[17] and signalled "the shift of the tools of production to the people formerly known as the audience,"[18] who became co-producers, of content, including news - a function and practice described as 'produsage'[19]. They initially built audiences via email and chat-rooms before social media platforms dramatically amplified their reach.

b) The arrival of social media

In many countries, by the late-2000s, Twitter and Facebook had joined YouTube as social media mainstays, influencing the practices and professional identities of journalists (especially regarding verification, audience engagement, and the clash of the personal and public spheres that occur on social platforms[20]), and the distribution of content. As individuals formed networks built around trust, peer-to-peer distribution of content (particularly on Facebook) began to challenge traditional methods of content dissemination.

Users curated their own content streams - including content from news services, journalists and other reliable information providers - without mediation. As a result of distribution via 'trust networks' (users and peers), inaccurate, false, malicious and propagandistic content masquerading as news found increased traction. Researchers have discovered that both emotive content, and content shared by a friend or family member is more likely to be redistributed on social media[21].

While journalists and news organisations have necessarily embedded themselves within these platforms for the purposes of newsgathering, audience engagement and content distribution (they needed to be where their audiences were active), 'filter bubbles'[22] or 'echo chambers'[23] developed (even if they are not quite as hermetic or insulated as sometimes suggested). These reduced many individual users' exposure to alternative views and verified information. This development has amplified the risks associated with 'information disorder'.

17 Gillmor, D. (2004). *We, the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People* (O'Reilly). http://www.authorama.com/we-the-media-8.html.

18 Rosen, J. (2006). *The People Formerly Known as the Audience,* PressThink blog (June 27th, 2006). http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html.

19 Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage.* Peter Lang, New York. See also: Bruns A (2006) Collaborative Online News Production. Peter Lang, New York.

20 Posetti, J. (2009). *Transforming Journalism...140 Characters at a Time* Rhodes Journalism Review 29, September 2009. https://rjr.ru.ac.za/rjrpdf/rjr_no29/Transforming_Journ.pdf.

21 Bakir, V. & McStay, A. (2017) *Fake News and the Economy of Emotions* Digital Journalism (Taylor and Francis) July, 2017. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645.

22 Note: Filter bubbles are the inflated space populated by like-minded people as a result of algorithms serving up individualised content to users c.f. Pariser, E. (2012). *The Filter Bubble.* Penguin and Random House, New York

23 'Echo chambers' refers to the effect of confirmation bias on people of like mind on social media platforms and Module 5 has more on 'confirmation bias'.

Benefits of audience-networked journalism include the ability to crowdsource diverse sources, undertake collaborative verification[24] (useful to correct misinformation, debunk disinformation, and call out malicious actors), and build loyal audiences (supported by direct engagement between the journalistic actor and the news consumer).[25] They also empower the audience to 'talk back' in order to correct the record where reporters are in error, or to contribute collaboratively to research. The networked public sphere also helps journalists and audiences to bypass arbitrary restrictions and censorship (e.g. layers of 'spin doctors'), which can be a fetter on access to information and open societies.

Journalists' engagement with audiences and information sources via social media channels can also be seen as a noteworthy new feature of accountability frameworks that aid self-regulation. These interactions allow journalists to publicly and swiftly respond to valid critiques of their work, to instantly correct errors, and to increase the transparency of their practice by 'making content out of process'.[26]

Downsides include:

- Increased likelihood of disinformation and misinformation going viral with distribution amplified by 'trust networks'[27] and emotional reactions (e.g. triggered by confirmation bias). (See Module 5)
- The ability of governments and other agencies to side-step news media interrogation and verification by 'going direct to audiences' to avoid scrutiny. There is evidence of increased manipulation of the power of social media by those seeking to influence election outcomes and public policy[28]
- Sensational information is more likely to be shared[29]
- The inability to easily pull back or correct disinformation and misinformation

24 Garcia de Torres, E. (2017). *The Social Reporter in Action: An Analysis of the Practice and Discourse of Andy Carvin* in Journalism Practice, 11(2-3). http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/20175127 86.2016.1245110.

25 Posetti, J. (2010). *Aussie #Spill Breaks Down Barriers Between Journalists, Audience* PBS Mediashift, May 24th, 2010. http://mediashift.org/2010/05/aussie-spill-breaks-down-wall-between-journalists-audience144/.

26 Posetti, J. (2013). *The 'Twitterisation' of investigative journalism* in S. Tanner & N. Richardson (Eds.), Journalism Research and Investigation in a Digital World (pp. 88-100): Oxford University Press. Available at https://ro.uow.edu.au/articles/chapter/The_twitterisation_of_investigative_journalism/27777093?file=50548131.

27 'Trust networks' are networks of people sharing information online via trust-based relationships (e.g. family and friendship groups) in an unmediated manner, peer-to-peer. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that social media users are more likely to share information derived from such 'trust networks' regardless of whether it's accurate or verified

28 Freedom House (2017). *Freedom of the Net 2017: Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy* Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-freedom-net-2017-manipulating-social-media-undermine-democracy. See also Cadwalladr, C. (2018). *I made Steve Bannon's Psychological Warfare Tool: Meet the data war whistleblower,* The Guardian/Observer https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/2017/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump.

29 Kalsnes, B. & Larsson, O. A. (2017). *Understanding News Sharing Across Social Media: Detailing distribution on Facebook and Twitter* in Journalism Studies (Taylor and Francis) March, 2017. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1297686?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=rjos20.

once it has gone viral - no amount of debunking or reportage exposing a falsehood will completely eliminate the impact of a fabricated story, a malicious meme, a propagandistic video masquerading as news, or an erroneous report caused by a failure of verification.

- The demand to publish instantly on social platforms can lead to the inadvertent sharing of disinformation and misinformation or material from spurious sources[30]
- The low level of media and information literacy and verification skills within broader society. This means that in many cases, general social media users are ill-equipped to determine if content is authentic before sharing it
- The risk of States undermining freedom of expression through unjustified censorship and shutdowns in response to the urgent problems outlined above
- The development of filter bubbles which theoretically confirm biases and reduce exposure to quality, verified information
- The risk of poor quality journalism practice further downgrading audience respect for the profession and giving legitimacy to attacks on news media by those who seek to silence critics
- The risk of audience confusion about what constitutes news, as distinct from disinformation masquerading as news[31]
- The ill-preparedness of newsrooms to deal with disinformation and the need for editorial social media teams to develop updated strategies to better combat the problem[32]

c) *The rise of the platforms*

The Guardian Editor-In-Chief Katherine Viner has assessed that "Facebook has become the richest and most powerful publisher in history by replacing editors with algorithms."[33] The social platforms have been hailed as 'the new gatekeepers'[34], although they remain reluctant to accept responsibility for traditional publishing oversights - including verification and curation - despite making decisions to

30 Posetti, J. (2009). *Rules of Engagement For Journalists on Twitter* PBS Mediashift, June 19th 2009. http://mediashift.org/2009/06/rules-of-engagement-for-journalists-on-twitter170/.

31 Nielsen, R. K. & Graves, L. (2017). *"News you don't believe": Audience Perspectives on Fake News* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism Factsheet (RISJ, Oxford). https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Nielsen%26Graves_factsheet_1710v3_FINAL_download.pdf.

32 Elizabeth, J. (2017) *After a Decade, It's Time to Reinvent Social Media in Newsrooms,* American Press Institute https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/strategy-studies/reinventing-social-media/single-page/.

33 Viner, K. (2017). *A mission for journalism in a time of crisis* The Guardian, November 17th, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/16/a-mission-for-journalism-in-a-time-of-crisis.

34 Bell, E. & Owen, T. (2017). *The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Reengineered Journalism* Tow Center for Digital Journalism. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/platform-press-how-silicon-valley-reengineered-journalism.php.

censor some content in a manner that undermines media freedom.[35] Efforts by the platforms to address disinformation and misinformation are evolving rapidly but their resistance to a) responding adequately, on a global scale, and b) taking publisher-style responsibility for the social and democratic impacts risks them becoming used as factories for 'information disorder' and online abuse.[36]

The function of the Facebook algorithm in news dissemination and the spread of disinformation, particularly in developing States, has come under scrutiny since 2016[37], especially in the context of computational propaganda, which affects a range of open social media platforms.[38] However, after initial commitments and actions in partnership with news organisations and journalism academics to address the crisis, including moves to surface reliable content and flag false and misleading posts, Facebook retreated dramatically from this function in January 2018.[39] A shift from open to more closed social media systems of audience engagement is likely to follow, with a whole new set of implications for news dissemination and the sustainability of quality journalism. There are also additional risks for the creation of filter bubbles and the viral spread of disinformation.[40] These include issues with search engine algorithms like Google's, which the company admitted in early 2018 have a tendency to reinforce confirmation bias. At the time of writing, Google had indicated that it was working on the problem: "There are often legitimate diverse perspectives offered by publishers, and we want to provide users visibility and access into those perspectives from multiple sources."[41]

Consequences of 'information disorder' for journalism and the news industry:

- Further erosion of trust in news brands, journalism and individual journalists who share inaccurate, fabricated, or misleading information
- Conflation of quality reporting with disinformation and poorly labelled native (paid) advertising content designed to mimic news, increasing general distrust

35 Hindustan Times (2016). *Facebook Says Will Learn From Mistake Over Vietnam Photo*. http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/facebook-says-will-learn-from-mistake-over-vietnam-photo/story-kwmb3iX6lKgmwaIGZeKlyN.html.

36 Posetti, J. (2017). *Fighting Back Against Prolific Online Harassment*, The Conversation, June 29th 2017. https://theconversation.com/fighting-back-against-prolific-online-harassment-in-the-philippines-80271.

37 Finkel, Casey & Mazur (2018). op cit

38 Grimme, C., Preuss, M., Adam, L., & Trautmann, H. (2017). *Social Bots: Human-Like by Means of Human Control?*. Big Data 5(4) https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/big.2017.0044.

39 Wang, S., Schmidt, C. & Hazard, O. L . (2018). *Publishers claim they're taking Facebook's newsfeed changes in their stride - is the bloodletting still to come?* NiemanLab. http://www.niemanlab.org/2018/01/publishers-claim-theyre-taking-facebooks-news-feed-changes-in-stride-is-the-bloodletting-still-to-come/.

40 Alaphillippe, A. (2018). *Facebook's Newsfeed Changes Are Probably Going to be Great for Fake News*, The Next Web. https://thenextweb.com/contributors/2018/01/2018/facebooks-news-feed-changes-probably-going-great-fake-news/.

41 Hao, K. (2018). *Google is finally admitting it has a filter bubble problem,* Quartz. https://qz.com/1194566/google-is-finally-admitting-it-has-a-filter-bubble-problem/.

- Further stress on the journalism business model – audiences may no longer turn to news media in times of crisis and disaster believing that they will be served reliable, verified information shared in the public interest. Such trust underpins brand loyalty - the kind essential to building any sustainable news business model
- Weakening of the role of journalists as agents for accountability (e.g. via investigative journalism), with flow-on effects for broader society
- Crackdowns (sometimes justified as necessary to eradicate 'fake news') that undermine press freedom and freedom of expression rights, including internet shutdowns, the blocking of platforms, and censorship
- Malicious targeting of journalists (in particular female journalists) by disinformation purveyors leveraging online harassment to discredit critical reporting, along with deliberate attempts to entrap journalists in distribution of disinformation and misinformation.[42]

Emerging industry practice: how news organisations are covering 'fake news' and countering 'information disorder'

The problems and risks outlined above demand professional vigilance, commitment to ethics, high standards of reporting and verification (including collaborative verification methods) of both information and sources, along with active debunking, and creative reportage on the problem.

Here are some examples of efforts by news organisations and individual reporters to cover the story, engage audiences in news literacy, and counter disinformation:

- The Guardian's use of Instagram Stories to counter the spread of disinformation, with short videos designed to engage young audiences https://www.instagram.com/p/BRd25kQBb5N/ (See also: The Guardian's 'Fake News' interactive quiz https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2016/dec/28/can-you-spot-the-real-fake-news-story-quiz)
- Rappler's deployment of investigative journalism and big data analysis to reveal propagandistic 'sock puppet' networks impacting on democracy in the Philippines https://www.rappler.com/nation/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet
- The New York Times' use of strong explanatory reporting on the problem through a case study approach: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/media/how-fake-news-spreads.html

42 See detailed analysis in Module Seven

- Columbia Journalism Review's commitment to reflective practice analysis of the problem: https://www.cjr.org/analysis/how_fake_news_sites_frequently_trick_big-time_journalists.php
- Guardian Australia's guide for reporters on challenging climate change denialism: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/planet-oz/2016/nov/08/tough-choices-for-the-media-when-climate-science-deniers-are-elected
- A Japanese debunking collaboration between journalists and academics during national elections in 2017 which built on the principles of the highly successful CrossCheck election-watch project in France the same year: http://www.niemanlab.org/2017/10/a-snap-election-and-global-worries-over-fake-news-spur-fact-checking-collaborations-in-japan/
- In the USA, Electionland is an interesting example of a collaboration that includes journalism educators and students: https://projects.propublica.org/electionland/[43]
- The global investigative coverage of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (involving The Observer & The Guardian, Channel 4 News and The New York Times) and the knowledge-empowering way in which Vox Media explained the complex story to its audience: a. https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/21/2017141428/cambridge-analytica-trump-russia-mueller b. https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/23/2017151916/facebook-cambridge-analytica-trump-diagram
- The Quint's harnessing of audience power to counter the spread of disinformation stories on WhatsApp in India, and their creative curation of verified content on the app: https://www.thequint.com/neon/satire/whatsapp-indian-elections-and-fake-propaganda-satire[44]

Instructors are encouraged to add other examples from learners' own regions and languages.

Also valuable are Professor Charlie Beckett's strategies for boosting ethical journalism practice in an era of 'fake news'. He says journalists should:

43 Editors' note: CrossCheck and Electionland are part of an emerging phenomenon of temporary initiatives in the form of partnerships, to counter disinformation during elections. Such "pop-up" partnerships can be a valuable phenomenon that compensates for the absence or relative weakness or isolation of established fact-checking institutions.

44 Note: For research examining the role of chat apps in disinformation distribution see: Bradshaw, S & Howard, P. (2018). *Challenging Truth and Trust: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation*. Working Paper 2018.1. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda: https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/posts/challenging-truth-and-trust-a-global-inventory-of-organized-social-media-manipulation/.

- Connect – be accessible and present on all platforms[45]
- Curate – help users to find good content wherever it is
- Be relevant – use users' language and 'listen' creatively
- Be expert – add value, insight, experience, context
- Be truthful – fact checking, balance, accuracy
- Be human – show empathy, diversity, [be] constructive
- Transparency – show sources, be accountable, allow criticism.[46]

Module Aims

- To produce understanding among participants of the structural causes of the news industry's weakening on the one hand and, on the other, the propulsion of disinformation and misinformation
- To enable participants to critically analyse the news industry's responses to the phenomenon of 'information disorder'
- To understand and critique the role of the platforms in the development and perpetuation of the disinformation crisis
- To learn from emerging good practice among journalists and news organisations responding effectively to the crisis

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants should be able to:

1. Critically assess the structural causes and the broad consequences of the news media's actions in reporting and distributing false information
2. Understand and critique the role of technology and the 'new gatekeepers' (i.e. the platforms) in enabling the viral distribution of disinformation and misinformation presented as news
3. Identify emerging best practices within the news industry for catching and combatting disinformation

45 Note: the editors acknowledge that it is not possible for all journalists to be across all platforms individually. It might be helpful, however, for newsrooms to assign individual journalists to emerging and less high-impact platforms in addition to the currently high-profile Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

46 Beckett, C. (2017). op cit

Module Format

This module is designed to be delivered face-to-face, or online. It is intended for execution in two parts: Theoretical and Practical

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A.Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
An interactive lecture and question and answer session delivered traditionally, or via a webinar platform facilitating remote participation. Lecture content can be drawn from the theory and examples supplied above. However, lecturers are encouraged to include culturally/ locally relevant case studies in the delivery of this module. Learning outcomes would be particularly well-served by a lecture taking the form of an expert panel discussion, with journalists, editors and representatives of the platforms invited to participate in a discussion moderated by the lecturer or instructor with direct engagement of the course participants via a question and answer session.	60 - 90 mins	1, 2, 3

B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
A workshop/tutorial which could be facilitated in a traditional classroom setting, or via an eLearning platform like Moodle, Facebook groups or other services that enable remote online participation. The workshop/tutorial exercise could adopt the following format. Tutorial groups to be divided into working groups of 3-5 participants each. Each group should: i. Be provided with a case study involving a news organisation's coverage or unwitting distribution of misinformation/ disinformation ii. Collaboratively assess the material, researching the origins of the information and the context of the erroneous reporting (e.g. Was this a breaking news story?); discuss the possible causes of the incident (paying attention to structural factors like recent newsroom downsizing, and the role of social media platforms); discuss their own experiences of being duped by disinformation iii. Collectively write a 250-word summary of their analysis of the likely causes of the publication, identifying three things that the journalist/s or news organisation could have done differently to possibly prevent publishing false information. This may be done using Google Docs or a similar collaborative editing tool and it should be submitted to their lecturer/tutor for review.	90 - 120 mins	1, 2, 3, 4

Suggested Assignment

Case Study Report (2000 words). Identify three case studies (including one from your country/region) involving a news organisation's distribution of, or investigation into, a case of disinformation. Deconstruct each example (discussing the causes and consequences of the publication of misinformation/disinformation) and extrapolate lessons learned from each case study (Note: participants should choose fresh examples - not those provided for discussion in the workshop connected to this module).

Reading

Bakir, V. & McStay, A. (2017). *Fake News and the Economy of Emotions* in Digital Journalism (Taylor and Francis). http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645.

Bell, E. & Owen, T. (2017). *The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Reengineered Journalism* Tow Center for Digital Journalism, March 29th, 2017. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/platform-press-how-silicon-valley-reengineered-journalism.php.

Ireton, C. (Ed) (2016). *Trends in Newsrooms 2016* (WAN-IFRA, Paris). https://wan-ifra.org/2016/06/trends-in-newsrooms-2016-step-up-to-the-next-level-of-journalism/.

Kalsnes, B. & Larsson, O. A. (2017). *Understanding News Sharing Across Social Media: Detailing distribution on Facebook and Twitter* in Journalism Studies (Taylor and Francis). http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1297686?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=rjos20.

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McChesney, W. & Picard, V. (Eds) (2011). *Will the Last Reporter Please Turn Out the Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done to Fix it*. The New Press, New York.

Mitchell, A., Holcomb, J. & Weisel, R. (2016). *State of the News Media* Pew Research Centre. http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/06/30143308/state-of-the-news-media-report-2016-final.pdf.

Posetti, J. (2009). *Transforming Journalism...140 Characters at a Time* Rhodes Journalism Review 29, https://rjr.ru.ac.za/rjrpdf/rjr_no29/Transforming_Journ.pdf.

Posetti, J. (2013). *The 'Twitterisation' of investigative journalism* in S. Tanner & N. Richardson (Eds.), Journalism Research and Investigation in a Digital World (pp. 88-100): Oxford University Press, Melbourne. http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2765&context=lhapapers.

Posetti, J. & Silverman, C. (2014). When *Good People Share Bad Things: The Basics of Social Media Verification* in Posetti (Ed) Trends in Newsrooms 2014 (WAN-IFRA, Paris). http://mediashift.org/2014/07/goodwhen-good-people-share-bad-things-the-basics-of-social-media-verification/.

Posetti, J. (Ed) (2015). *Trends in Newsrooms 2015* (WAN-IFRA, Paris). https://wan-ifra.org/2015/08/trends-in-newsrooms-business-of-gender-equality/, (See also Trends in Newsrooms 2014).

RISJ (2018). *Digital News Report 2018* (University of Oxford). https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/digital-news-report-2018.pdf.

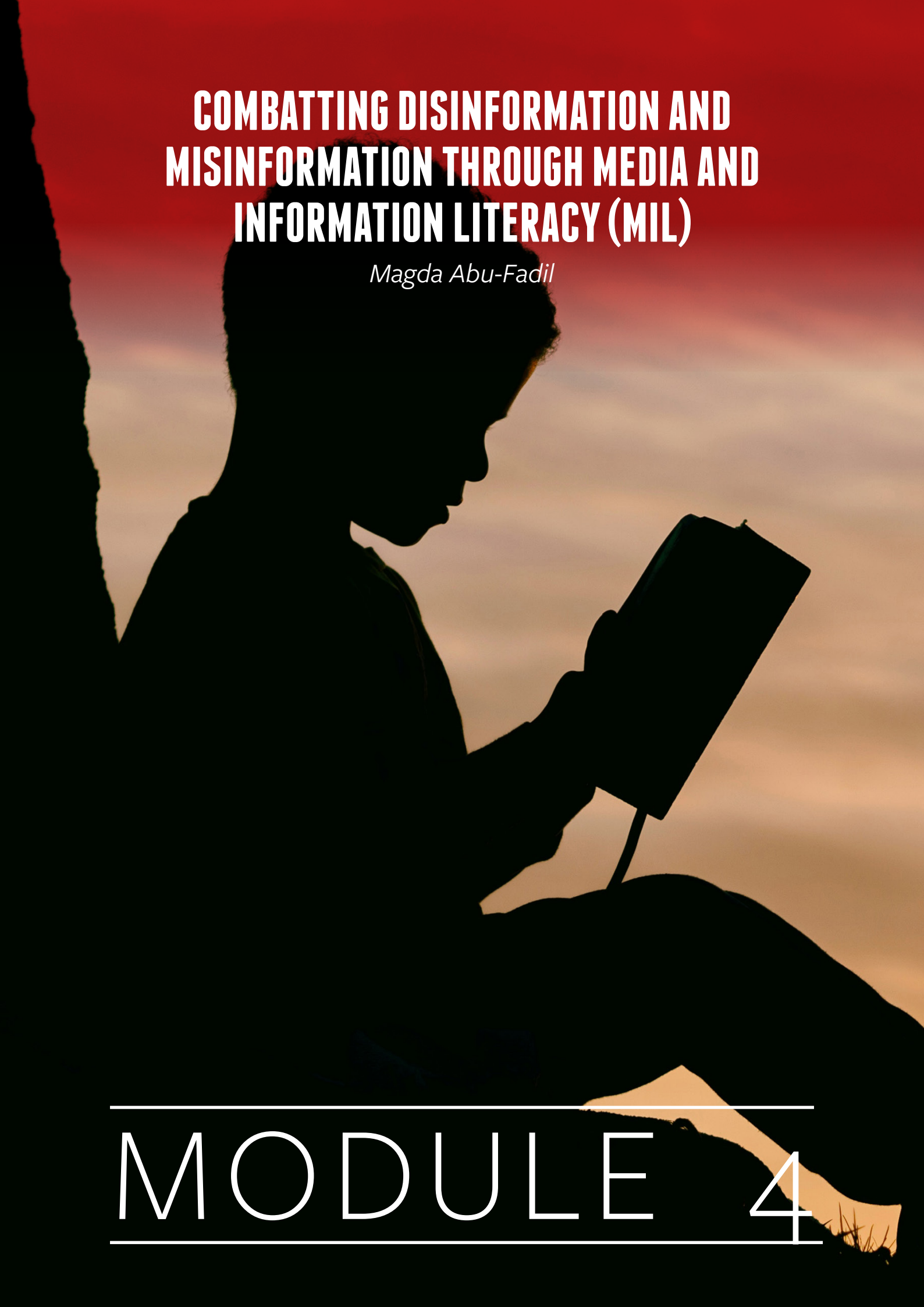
Silverman, C. (2015). *Lies, Damn Lies and Viral Content*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism. https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8Q81RHH.

Society of Climate Change Reporters (2016). *Climate Change: A Guide to Information and Disinformation* http://www.sejarchive.org/resource/ClimateInfo.htm.

UNESCO (2017). *States and journalists can take steps to counter 'fake news'*. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/states-and-journalists-can-take-steps-counter-fake-news.

COMBATTING DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION THROUGH MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY (MIL)

Magda Abu-Fadil



MODULE 4

Synopsis

This module introduces students to the concept of Media and Information Literacy[1] (MIL) to understand news as a means to detect 'information disorder' in obvious and subliminal messages. MIL is an umbrella concept used by UNESCO to stress the inter-relatedness of competencies regarding information broadly, and media in particular. These cover human rights literacy (especially the right to freedom of expression as each person's right to seek, receive and impart information and opinion); news literacy (including literacy about journalistic standards and ethics); advertising literacy; computer literacy; understanding of the 'attention economy'; intercultural literacy; privacy literacy; etc.. It includes understanding how communications interact with individual identity and social developments. MIL is increasingly an essential life skill – needed to know what is co-shaping one's identity and how one can navigate information fog and avoid concealed mines within the mist. MIL informs our consumption, production, discovery, evaluation and sharing of information, and our understanding of ourselves and others in the information society.

News literacy is the more specific ability to understand the language and conventions of news as a genre, and to recognise how these features can be exploited with malicious intent. Important as this is, however, on its own it is unlikely to produce full resilience to disinformation in the garb of news. This is because humans engage communications not only with their heads, but also with their hearts. Hence, MIL also needs to include attention to raising awareness amongst individuals about how they respond to content in news, and their predispositions to give credence or not to information even independently of the signals of the genre.

MIL therefore should, at root, give individuals insight into their own identity – who they are, and who they are becoming, and how this affects their engagement with news and other kinds of communications. This module aims to help participants recognise and distinguish journalism on the one hand and information that purports to be journalism on the other. Such empowerment enables individuals to be masters of their own identity and to recognise and resist when they are being manipulated in relation to disinformation masquerading as news.

The participants will learn how to develop and use the critical thinking skills framework of "Purposeful Reflective Judgment"[2] which involves using analysis, interpretation, evaluation, self-regulation, inference and explanation.

Participants are put through the paces of analysing news in print, broadcast (radio and television), online and social media, deconstructing messages into their component parts, as well as learning about sources and their credibility (or the lack thereof).

1 https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy.

2 Facione, P. (2010, updated). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*. [online] Insight Assessment. Available at: https://www.insightassessment.com/.

They will learn that authentic news is not science, but embedded in narratives which, despite being diverse, do generally adhere to professional methods and ethics which help to reduce mistakes and which certainly eschew fabrication. Journalists should report on, and signal, lies expressed by various actors; conversely they should never accept claims as facts, nor present them without providing the accompanying qualifications that inform the audience about the actual situation.

In this module, students will also learn how quick and easy it is to exploit "journalese" to produce an apparently credible and convincing story out of incomplete, misleading, or invented details.[3]

Teaching materials for this module focus on raising awareness about the importance of MIL in tackling misinformation and disinformation. This includes the use of critical thinking skills to detect 'news' that has been fabricated. It also highlights the significance of participants exercising their own MIL in their daily lives. It helps them see how MIL can reinforce their human rights and those of others; and the importance of avoiding promoting and disseminating untruths.[4]

Teaching takes place in a computer-equipped, Internet-connected learning space. Participants may use their personal mobile devices' online chat applications during the practical segments of the lesson. The Internet is needed for accessing off-campus online sources while access to a campus Intranet (where this module is offered at tertiary level) is used to access the library and any other on-campus dedicated information resource centres.

Outline

Disinformation disguised as news emanating from the U.S., French, Kenyan, and German elections in 2016 and 2017 is just the tip of the iceberg of a great many information challenges to societies – although perhaps with greatest potential consequence. Consider, however, that television stations and social media users around the world tracked in real time a miracle in the making in Mexico in 2017 as rescuers tried to free a schoolgirl, #FridaSofía, trapped in rubble after an earthquake – only to find she did not exist[5]. The story was false, though not perhaps a case of deliberate fakery. Yet journalism has to avoid both the mistaken and the counterfeit. Not all falsehood in news is 'fake news' in the sense of disinformation, but both are problematic for the ability of society to understand the world.

3 For examples of "journalese" consider: Fluent in Journalese by Philip B. Corbett. March 17, 2015 https://afterdeadline.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/03/2017/fluent-in-journalese/ ; My 'shameful secret': I've learnt to love clichéd journalese by Rob Hutton. 05 Sep 2013. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/10288967/My-shameful-secret-Ive-learnt-to-love-cliched-journalese.html.

4 The integration of MIL in journalism education is studied by for example Van der Linde, F. 2010. The necessity of a media literacy module within journalism or media studies curricula. Global Media Journal, African Edition. Vol 4, no.2 http://globalmedia.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/7

5 Campoy, A. (2017). *A schoolgirl trapped in Mexico's earthquake rubble won the world's hearts – except she did not exist.* Quartz. Available at: https://qz.com/1084105/a-schoolgirl-trapped-in-mexicos-earthquake-rubble-won-the-worlds-hearts-except-she-didnt-exist/.

Users of news need sophisticated media and information literacy in general but also a degree of philosophical understanding. For instance, they should grasp that authentic news does not constitute the full "truth" (which is something only approximated in human interactions with each other and with reality over time). Participants, and journalism students especially, should nevertheless understand that the point is that journalism ought never to perpetuate what is false. Sightings of whales and sharks in people's pools or backyards following hurricanes and other improbable side effects of natural disasters covered by the media beg the question: *Really*? News that fails to deliver on its implied respect for verified facts can be a result of sloppy reporting and inadequate publishing processes, but it can also be deliberately deceptive and therefore fraudulent. MIL is needed to decipher the difference, and how such cases compare to professional and ethical news.

The road is long. Rising levels of hate speech, xenophobia and attacks on refugees or people from "other" religions, ethnicities, and of different skin colour, based on stereotypes stoked by concocted statistics, populist rhetoric, and misleading media reports that fail to meet the standards of journalism, add to the toxic mix which MIL needs to counter. This will rapidly become even more complicated as computer programmes using Artificial Intelligence (AI) are used to create simulations of people in phoney video and/or audio reports that have no basis in truth.[6]

Enter the need for guiding students and practitioners of journalism to think critically about what they hear and see, from the simplest conversation to the most widely disseminated news in traditional and digital multimedia.

In addition to the types of disinformation and misinformation identified by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017)[7], the Brussels-based, non-profit organisation European Association for Viewers' Interests (EAVI), within the context of its Media Literacy for Citizenship programme, has produced a handy infographic called "Beyond Fake News: Ten Types of Misleading News" that summarises what news consumers face today.[8] It is a valuable resource for journalism students and practitioners.

Dr Peter A. Facione's updated research paper *"Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts"* [9] is a good launch pad for students to acquaint them with "reasoning, decision-making, and effective individual and group thinking processes". It is all the more relevant in the age of 'post-truth', 'fake news' and 'alternative facts'. In this approach, critical thinking includes:

6 Edmund, C. (2017). *This AI can create a video of Barack Obama saying anything*. [online] World Economic Forum. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/07/obama-speech-simulation-washington-university?

7 See Module Two

8 EAVI. (2018). EAVI.eu. [online] Available at: https://eavi.eu/beyond-fake-news-10-types-misleading-info

9 Facione, P. (2010, updated). Ibid. *Critical Thinking.*

- Inquisitiveness about a wide range of issues
- Concern to become and remain well-informed
- Alertness to opportunities to use critical thinking
- Trust in the processes of reasoned inquiry
- Self-confidence in one's own abilities to reason
- Open-mindedness regarding divergent worldviews
- Flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions
- Understanding of the opinions of other people
- Fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning
- Recognising and honestly facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, or egocentric tendencies
- Prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments
- Willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted

According to various studies, in many parts of the world young people's engagement with mobile devices[10] means they get most of their news through these machines via chat applications (apps), social media, and, occasionally, traditional media websites and blogs. [11] [12] [13] On many of these, there is little or nothing to flag what is reputable journalism and what is amateur reportage, let alone what is disinformation.

Another issue is how the platforms treat news. For Facebook, the biggest social platform by far, "...journalism has been a pain in the neck from day one. Now, bogged down with the insoluble problems of fake news and bad PR, it's clear that Facebook will gradually pull the plug on news", argues Frederic Filloux.[14] How that plays out remains to be seen. Some news organisations would feel let down if the plug is pulled, saying their audiences would be short-changed, as Facebook has been a conduit for users

10 *Children's use of mobile phones*. (2015). [ebook] Tokyo: Mobile Society Research Institute, NTT Dotcomo. Available at: https://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/GSMA_Childrens_use_of_mobile_phones_2014.pdf

11 *Digital News Report (2017)*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's (RISJ, Oxford) https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf

12 Shearer, E. & Gottfried, J. (2017). *News Use Across Social Media Platforms*. [ebook] Washington DC: Pew Research Centre. Available at: http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/

13 *Youth, Internet, and Technology in Lebanon: A Snapshot* (2017) Social Media Exchange. Available at https://smex.org/youth-internet-and-technology-in-lebanon-a-snapshot/

14 Filloux, F. (2018). *The Monday Note*, 14 January, 2018. Available at: https://mondaynote.com/facebook-is-done-with-quality-journalism-deal-with-it-afc2475f1f84

who depend on the social media platform to keep abreast of events.[15] But some MIL proponents hope such a move might lead young news consumers to expand their horizons in search of what is happening in the world around them and not rely entirely on social media, with its information pollution, and being fed effortlessly through their 'always on' devices. At the same time, there are some suggestions that Facebook may even get into news production itself, competing with existing media actors.[16]

With MIL, participants can learn to recognise that even authentic news is always constructed and consumed within wider narrative frameworks which give meanings to facts, and which implicate broader assumptions, ideologies and identities. This means the ability to recognise the difference between diverse journalistic attempts to capture and interpret salient reality on the one hand, and on the other, instances of deception that exploit the format of news while violating professional standards of verifiability.

MIL can also be a tool to combat stereotyping and promote cross-cultural communication, with multilingualism being a significant factor in attaining that goal. Various actors have contributed to the MIL effort, and good resources can be found on UNESCO's website.[17] But much still needs to be done through curricula, and in practice, to dull the blow of disinformation and misinformation.[18]

To achieve impact with this module, the ubiquity of video can be capitalised upon to engage with participants by using short, captioned videos[19] as a form of MIL "edutainment" to feature false messages, challenge learners to find their own examples of misleading material, and accustom them to take every bit of content, including that presented as news, with a very large grain of salt.

Instructors should also help participants revise their tendency to superficially "Google" for most information by initiating deeper online searches, including advanced search functions, cross-checking multiple sources of information, and understanding the value of libraries and librarians in building literacies concerning the searching for and evaluating of information.[20] E-libraries have made it much easier to access scholarly and other references that journalism students and practising journalists can use to deepen their knowledge of processes and practices towards critically assessing and verifying

15 See Module Three

16 Is Facebook's Campbell Brown a Force to Be Reckoned With? Or Is She Fake News? https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/21/technology/facebook-campbell-brown-news.html

17 See https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy.

18 Abu-Fadil, M. (2007). *Media Literacy: A Tool to Combat Stereotypes and Promote Intercultural Understanding.* Available at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001611/161157e.pdf.

19 Here is an example of video used powerfully to demonstrate the value of news media literacy in the context of US school shootings from Vice Media: Hoaxers say victims of mass shootings are 'crisis actors', Vice Select on Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/vicenews/videos/842904982564160/.

20 *15 resources for teaching media literacy*. ASCD.

information. Other resources also complement the learning/knowledge process to help participants enter the fraudulent news fray, guard against its negative impact, and be positioned to debunk it as part of doing journalism.[21]

Civic engagement with social media users who receive and share disinformation and misinformation is also a promising method for journalists and journalism students to learn how to find, track and effectively disprove falsehoods both for themselves and in their communities. Instructors are encouraged to consider exercises in this regard for this module.

The words of Rouba El Helou, Senior Media Lecturer and Researcher, Notre Dame University – Lebanon, are useful to consider the relevance of this module: "Equipping people with the skills needed to decode various messages is an ongoing struggle that media educators and journalists are all asked to join. Media Literacy helps people to find an equilibrium between trust of news sources and the necessary suspicion to question them".

Module Aims

This module aims to:

- Underscore the importance of acquiring the requisite literacies[22] and implicated skills[23] to understand journalism (and various journalism variants) and at the same time detect both flawed journalism as well as fraudulent news in various media.
- Equip participants with the skills to unpack their consumption of news across the media spectrum and skills to see how easy it is to produce disinformation.
- Teach participants to develop a healthy scepticism towards all information they consume and how to weigh the veracity of reports, posts, feeds, photos, videos, audio content, infographics, and statistics within appropriate contexts.

21 An example is Project Look Sharp, a media literacy initiative of Ithaca College, which has media literacy guides, curriculum kits and downloadable handouts. www.projectlooksharp.org.

22 For information regarding media and information literacies see UNESCO's Notions of MIL http://unesco.mil-for-teachers.unaoc.org/foreword/unifying-notions-of-media-and-information-literacy/.

23 In addition to critical thinking skills identified by Facione (2010), participants should be encouraged to be sceptical; question everything; assume nothing; fact-check sources.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, students will be able to:

1. Distinguish fact from fiction as well as the legitimacy of potentially diverse narratives and stories within authentic journalism,
2. Understand how stories are selected, who produces the content, what methods are used to create the appearance of an authentic representation of reality, how language is used, what is emphasised, what is omitted, who is saying what, how important and/or reliable that person is, what his/her agenda may be, what impact that news had/has/will have, and how others view and consume the same news.
3. Have insight into their own MIL levels and the relevance of this to whom they are as individuals and how it interacts with their engagement with information and communication.

Module Format

The module is divided into two 90-minute sessions. The first session is theoretical and the second session is practical.

The methodology relies on discussion of what MIL means and its importance in an age of disinformation, misinformation and other distortions that go viral through traditional and social media. The materials for this class can be accessed through the Internet, and there are many useful resources for research and practical exercises.

Useful sites include:

- UNESCO https://www.unesco.org/en and its Media Literacy site https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy
- United Nations Alliance of Civilisations https://www.unaoc.org/
- Media and information literacy curriculum for teachers https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en/curriculum
- 5 laws of MIL https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/files/2022/02/Global%20Standards%20for%20Media%20and%20Information%20Literacy%20Curricula%20Development%20Guidelines_EN.pdf
- Common Sense Education https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/media-news-and-information-literacy-resources-for-students

- EAVI Media and Literacy for Citizenship https://eavi.eu/beyond-fake-news-10-types-misleading-info/
- The News Literacy Project http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/, the Center for News Literacy at Stony Brook University http://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/
- Mind over Media http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/
- The Digital Resources Center (Center for News Literacy) http://drc.centerfornewsliteracy.org/
- The Center for Media and Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island https://centermil.org/resources/, to name a few

Instructors are encouraged to add resources from their respective countries and regions in different languages.

The classroom should be equipped with computers and access to the Internet allowing the instructor and students to examine websites of organisations involved in media and information literacy, along with media case studies.

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A. Theoretical

The instructor will present materials and case studies on MIL and its relation to disinformation and misinformation that pose as news.

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Explain and discuss MIL and tools including critical thinking framework	45 mins	1 + 3
Review and discuss selected examples that are locally relevant in various media formats	45 mins	1 + 2

B. Practical:

Activities related to the learning materials and tools.

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Practical activities	90 mins	1 + 3
Activity 1: *Recognising journalism(s)* Identify a front page story from the local press. Each student should research and examine the same story as it appeared in three different media outlets. Guide a discussion asking students to apply the technique of critical thinking. They should also unpack the underlying narrative, along with the framing, selection and packaging of news. This unpacking should give particular attention to the presence of the conventions of news (who, what, where, when, how, why elements; use of direct quotes; reliance on expert and authoritative sources, supportive images, stereotyped terminology typical to "journalese", along with other 'news-iness' signals.	45 mins	1 + 2
Activity 2: *Presenting disinformation as news* Show participants an example of fraudulent news and discuss what 'works' and what 'gives the game away'. Then get students to manipulate the stories they have read in the previous exercise by creating a fraudulent story, set in the near future, which will have the prima facie appearance of news. (An alternative is for students to choose their own topic for their disinformation creation.) Once completed, the students form groups to assess what made the story look authentic. This could involve the use of an evaluation test , but it should also include identification of signifiers of news that have been exploited by the pieces. Re-group, and get the participants to share their insights via short presentations to the whole cohort.	45 mins	1 + 3

Suggested Assignment

Each individual should do a search of their respective social media feeds for a scientific or medical news story (e.g. a diet fad, the outbreak of a disease, the impact of global warming on their community, the efficiency of electric cars vs. fuel-operated vehicles). They assess their research, their confirmation bias (where active), and their emotional reactions to the story/perspectives on the issues, seeing how these relate to MIL issues such as search, evaluation, digital security, rights, and identity, along with the core ethical principles of news.

They should then provide information gained from their research about: who produced the story; how that reporter or person knows what was published, and if he/she stands to benefit from disseminating it; double check the data, statistics, infographics. If possible, students also make use of their university's library/e-library to verify the data. They write up their findings in a 1500-word piece of media criticism, analysing the strengths, weaknesses, omissions and failings of the identified content.

Materials

Articles containing slides, pictures, and videos are listed below. Instructors are encouraged to create their own slideshows and include photos and videos relevant to their respective countries and contexts.

Reading

Abu-Fadil, M. & Grizzle, A. (*2016*). *Opportunities for Media and Information Literacy in the Middle East and North Africa.*Available at: https://milunesco.unaoc.org/wp-content/uploads/MIL-Mena-2016-english.pdf.

A lexicon for the digital age. (2017). The Unesco Courier, [online] (July - September 2017). Available at: https://courier.unesco.org/en/articles/lexicon-digital-age.

Facione, P. (2010). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*. [online] Insight Assessment. Available at: https://www.insightassessment.com/.

Gray, J., Bounegru, L.& Venturini, T. (2017). *What does fake news tell us about life in the digital age? Not what you might expect.* NiemanLab. [online] Available at: http://www.niemanlab.org/2017/04/what-does-fake-news-tell-us-about-life-in-the-digital-age-not-what-you-might-expect/.

Stephens, B. (2017). *The Dying Art of Disagreement*. The New York Times. [online] Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/24/opinion/dying-art-of-disagreement.html.

Additional Reading

Lytvynenko, J. (2018). *Here's How A Canadian Imam Got Caught Up In Fake News About Houston*. BuzzFeed. [online] Available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/janelytvynenko/toronto-imam-caught-up-in-fake-news?bftw&utm_term=.ha3w9B5rr#.acEgmYE66.

Mulrooney Eldred, S. (2017). *In an era of fake news, students must act like journalists: schools rarely require news literacy, but it's more important than ever*. Science News. [online] Available at: https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/era-fake-news-students-must-act-journalists.

Rusbridger, A., Neilsen, R. and Skjeseth, H. (2017). *We asked people from all over the world how journalists should cover powerful people who lie. Here is what they said*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/we-asked-people-all-over-world-how-journalists-should-cover-powerful-people-who-lie.

Vesey-Byrne, J. (2017). *Bikini designer exposes why you shouldn't trust everything you see on Instagram*. The Independent. [online] Available at: https://www.indy100.com/viral/bikini-designer-instagram-before-after-karina-irby-7934006.

FACT-CHECKING 101

Alexios Mantzarlis

MODULE 5

Synopsis

From politicians to marketers, from advocacy groups to brands — everyone who seeks to convince others has an incentive to distort, exaggerate or obfuscate the facts. This module seeks to equip participants with a methodology to detect fact-checkable claims and evaluate evidence critically, in line with ethical norms and standards.

Outline

History and semantics of fact-checking as a form of accountability journalism

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, U.S. Senator for the state of New York and Ambassador to India and the United Nations (1927-2003) famously said: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts."[1]

The term "fact-checking" can mean two different things in journalism. Traditionally, fact-checkers were employed by newsrooms to proofread and verify factual claims made by reporters in their articles. This genre of fact-checking evaluates the solidity of the reporting, double-checks facts and figures, and serves as an overall round of quality control for a news outlet's content before publication. The dawn of this practice in modern journalism — at least in the West — is attributed to major U.S. weekly magazines like *TIME* in the 1920s.[2]

The economic contraction experienced by most news organisations around the world since the turn of the 21st century[3] has meant that fact-checking departments have shrunk, been merged with copy-editing desks, or eliminated altogether. Today, it is primarily high-brow weekly magazines like *The New Yorker* in the United States or *Der Spiegel* in Germany that still employ dedicated editorial fact-checkers.[4]

The type of fact-checking which will be the focus of this module happens not before something is published but after a claim becomes of public relevance. This form of "ex post" fact-checking seeks to make politicians and other public figures accountable for the truthfulness of their statements. Fact-checkers in this line of work seek primary and reputable sources that can confirm or negate claims made to the public.

"Ex post" fact-checking concentrates primarily (but not exclusively) on political ads, campaign speeches and party manifestos. Early projects dedicated to this form of

1 Moynihan, D. & Weisman, S. (2010). *Daniel Patrick Moynihan*. New York: PublicAffairs.

2 Scriber, B. (2016). *Who decides what's true in politics? A history of the rise of political fact-checking*. [online] Poynter. Available at: https://www.poynter.org/news/who-decides-whats-true-politics-history-rise-political-fact-checking.

3 See Module Three

4 Bloyd-Peshkin, S. & Sivek, S. (2017). *Magazines find there's little time to fact-check online*. [online] Columbia Journalism Review. Available at: https://www.cjr.org/b-roll/magazine-fact-checking-online.php.

political fact-checking include Factcheck.org, a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, launched in 2003, and Channel 4 Fact Check, launched in 2005.

Fact-checking has grown in relevance and has spread around the world in the recent decade.

Two moments were particularly significant to the growth of this journalistic practice. A first wave was kick-started by the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting, assigned to PolitiFact, a fact-checking project launched just over a year earlier by the *St Petersburg Times* (now *Tampa Bay Times*) in Florida. PolitiFact's innovation was to rate claims on a "Truth-O-Meter," adding a layer of structure and clarity to the fact checks. (To critics, ratings introduce subjectivity to the process.) This structured approach made it very clear to audiences what political fact-checking was about — and clarified the role of the instrument as a journalistic tool meant to make public figures accountable for their words — in the process, inspiring dozens of projects around the world.[5]

The second wave of fact-checking projects emerged following the global surge in so-called 'fake news'. The term, now co-opted and misused, describes entirely fabricated sensationalist stories that reach enormous audiences by using social media algorithms to their advantage. As it became clear over the course of 2016 that the online information infrastructure was particularly permeable to disinformation and misinformation, more and more groups decided to turn their attention to fact-checking.

This second wave often concentrated as much on fact-checking public claims as debunking these viral hoaxes. Debunking is a subset of fact-checking and requires a specific set of skills that are in common with verification (especially of user-generated content known as UGC - see Venn diagram below). This module will concentrate on fact-checking as defined below, while the next module will tackle verification of digital content and sources.[6]

5 Mantzarlis, A. (2017). *In its first decade, PolitiFact helped define political fact-checking far beyond Washington, D.C.* [online] Poynter. Available at: https://www.poynter.org/news/its-first-decade-politifact-helped-define-political-fact-checking-far-beyond-washington-dc.

6 See Module Six

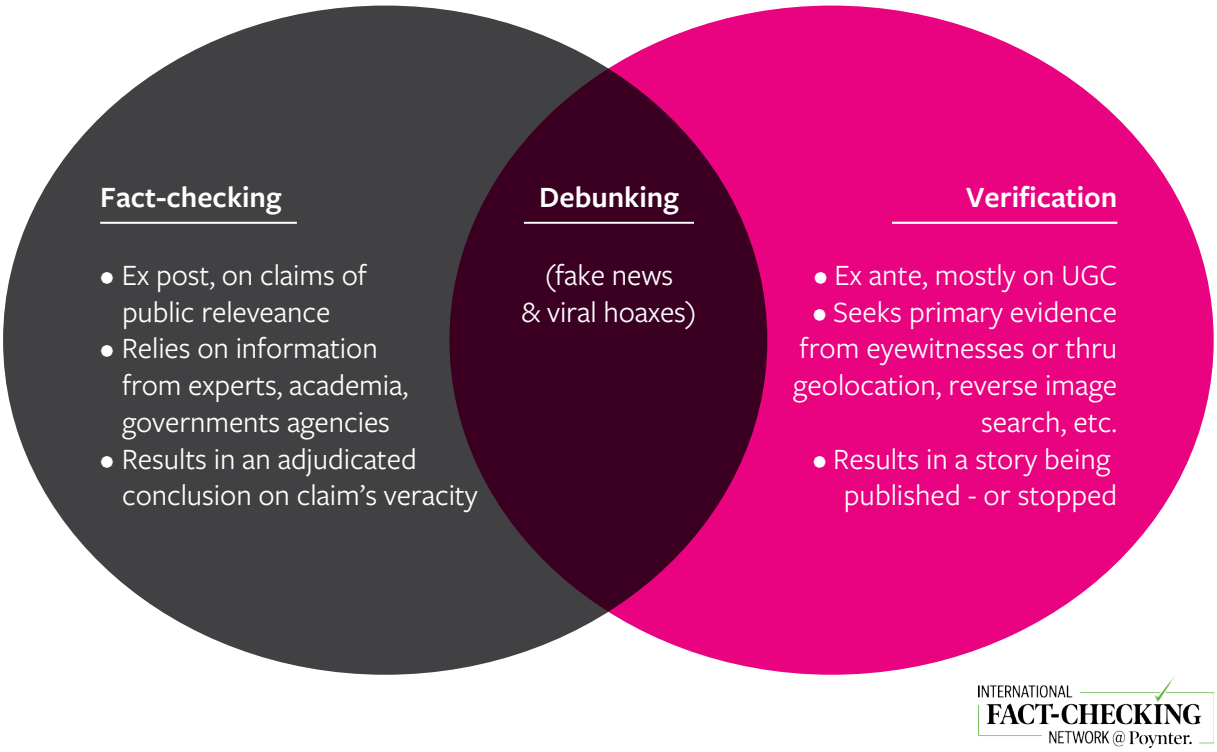

Fact-checking
• Ex post, on claims of public releveance
• Relies on information from experts, academia, governments agencies
• Results in an adjudicated conclusion on claim's veracity
Debunking
(fake news & viral hoaxes)
Verification
• Ex ante, mostly on UGC
• Seeks primary evidence from eyewitnesses or thru geolocation, reverse image search, etc.
• Results in a story being published - or stopped
INTERNATIONAL FACT-CHECKING NETWORK @ Poynter.

Figure 5: The difference between Fact-checking and Verification

Examples of fact-checking organisations around the world

According to the Duke Reporters' Lab, there were 137 fact-checking projects active in 51 countries in December 2017[7].

While the United States is the largest market for fact-checking, some of the most thoughtful and innovative work in this field is happening in the rest of the world. Instructors may want to familiarise themselves with projects such as Africa Check (South Africa, Senegal, Nigeria and Kenya), Chequeado (Argentina), Les Décodeurs (France), Faktisk (Norway) and Full Fact (United Kingdom).

For instructors who want to concentrate on specific countries or regions, the following resources may be helpful:

- **Brazil:** "Fact-checking booms in Brazil," an article by Kate Steiker-Ginzberg for Poynter, available at: https://www.poynter.org/news/fact-checking-booms-brazil
- **Europe:** "The Rise of Fact-Checking Sites in Europe" a report by Lucas Graves and Federica Cherubini for the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, available at https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/rise-fact-checking-sites-europe

7 Stencel, M. (2017). *Fact-checking booms as numbers grow by 20 percent*. [online] Duke Reporters Lab. Available at: https://reporterslab.org/big-year-fact-checking-not-new-u-s-fact-checkers/.

- **Japan:** "A new fact-checking coalition is launching in Japan" an article by Masato Kajimoto for Poynter, available at https://www.poynter.org/news/new-fact-checking-coalition-launching-japan
- **South Korea:** "What's behind South Korea's fact-checking boom? Tense politics and the decline of investigative journalism," an article by Boyoung Lim for Poynter, available at http://www.poynter.org/2017/whats-behind-south-koreas-fact-checking-boom-tense-politics-and-the-decline-of-investigative-journalism/463655/
- **Latin America:** "Lack of access to information is driving Latin America's fact-checking boom" an article by Ivan Echt for Poynter, available online at https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2016/lack-of-access-to-information-is-driving-latin-americas-fact-checking-boom/
- **United States of America:** "Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism" a book by Lucas Graves or its review by Brad Scriber on Poynter, available online at: https://www.poynter.org/news/who-decides-whats-true-politics-history-rise-political-fact-checking

Methodology and ethics of fact-checking

Fact-checking is not rocket science. It *is* scrupulous analysis driven by one basic question: "How do we know that?" At the same time, fact-checking is not spell-checking. There is not a dictionary-style guidebook with all the facts, nor a simple software that will examine documents and flag anytime something has been misstated as fact.

Generally speaking, fact-checking is composed of three phases:

1. **Finding fact-checkable claims** by scouring through legislative records, media outlets and social media. This process includes determining which major public claims (a) can be fact-checked and (b) ought to be fact-checked.
2. **Finding the facts** by looking for the best available evidence regarding the claim at hand.
3. **Correcting the record** by evaluating the claim in light of the evidence, usually on a scale of truthfulness.

Trustworthy fact-checking organisations explain their process in public methodologies. Instructors may want to walk students through one or more of the following:

1. Africa Check's "*How We Work*" page (accessible at https://africacheck.org/about-us/how-we-work/) as well as the infographic in the Materials section
2. Chequeado's "*Metodo*" (accessible in Spanish at: http://chequeado.com/metodo/)
3. Pagella Politica's "*Metodologia*" and "*Come funzioniamo*" (accessible in Italian at https://pagellapolitica.it/progetto/index)
4. PolitiFact's *"The Principles of PolitiFact"* (accessible at https://www.politifact.com/article/2013/jun/03/principles-politifact/)

The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)[8] has also developed a code of principles that guide conscientious fact-checkers in their everyday work.

Fact-checking organisations apply to become verified signatories of the IFCN code of principles. This requires an external assessment that evaluates the effective implementation of these standards. Instructors may want to familiarise themselves with the code and find assessments made on fact-checking organisations from their country[9] and discuss whether the students find that these make them more likely to trust the fact-checkers or not.

These principles have been developed to help readers discern good fact-checking from bad. For an example of misinformation masquerading as fact-checking, instructors may want to share the examples in these two articles:

- These fake fact-checkers are peddling lies about genocide and censorship in Turkey (Poynter) https://www.poynter.org/news/these-fake-fact-checkers-are-peddling-lies-about-genocide-and-censorship-turkey
- In the post-truth era Sweden's far-right fake fact checker was inevitable. (The Guardian) https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/jan/19/in-the-post-truth-era-swedens-far-right-fake-fact-checker-was-inevitable

What gets in the way of facts

Before diving into the practical aspects of fact-checking, students need to be aware of its limitations — and their own.

Some commentators have declared that we have entered a "post-truth" or "post-fact" era. These terms featured in headlines all over the world in 2016 and were selected as the "Word of the Year" by, respectively, the Oxford English Dictionary and the Society

8 The author, Alexios Mantzarlis, leads the International Fact Checking Network

9 Available at https://www.poynter.org/international-fact-checking-network-fact-checkers-code-principles.

for the German Language. The argument made by the "post-truthers" is that politics and the media have become so polarised and tribal that citizens flat-out reject any facts that they disagree with.

That does not quite square with a growing body of research that has found that when corrected especially through reference to authorities deemed credible by the audience, people become (on average) better informed. Instructors may want to read and discuss the following studies with their students:

- Swire, B., Berinsky, A. J., Lewandowsky, S. & Ecker, U. K. H. (2017). Processing political misinformation: comprehending the Trump phenomenon (1 March 2017). Available at http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/4/3/160802.
- Nyhan, B. & Zeitzoff, T. (2018). Fighting the Past: Perceptions of Control, Historical Misperceptions, and Corrective Information in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Available at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.12449/abstract.
- Wood, T. & Porter, E. (2016). The Elusive Backfire Effect: Mass Attitudes' Steadfast Factual Adherence (August 5, 2016). Available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2819073.

At the same time, it would be absurdly simplistic to suggest that facts are perfect characterisations of the world and that humans are entirely rational beings who incorporate new facts flawlessly regardless of previous belief and personal preferences. Each of us comes with cognitive and other biases — essentially mental obstacles — that can get in the way of absorbing new factual information. It is crucial to stress that this is not something that happens to other people, it happens to all of us.

Instructors should discuss some of these biases in the classroom.

Confirmation bias [*From the Encyclopaedia Britannica* — https://www.britannica.com/topic/confirmation-bias]: the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one's existing beliefs. This biased approach to decision making is largely unintentional and often results in ignoring inconsistent information. Existing beliefs can include one's expectations in a given situation and predictions about a particular outcome. People are especially likely to process information to support their own beliefs when the issue is highly important or self-relevant.

Motivated reasoning [*From Discover Magazine* — https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/what-is-motivated-reasoning-how-does-it-work-dan-kahan-answers]. Motivated cognition refers to the unconscious tendency of individuals to fit their processing of information to conclusions that suit some end or goal. Consider a classic example. In the 1950s, psychologists asked experimental subjects, students from two Ivy League colleges, to watch a film that featured a set of controversial officiating calls made during a football game between teams from their respective schools. The students from each school were more likely to see the referees' calls as correct when it favoured their school than when it favoured their rival. The researchers concluded that the emotional stake the students had in affirming their loyalty to their respective institutions shaped what they saw on the tape.

Availability heuristic [*From Oxford University Press A Dictionary of Psychology* — http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534067.001.0001/acref-9780199534067-e-830]. A cognitive heuristic through which the frequency or probability of an event is judged by the number of instances of it that can readily be brought to mind. This can lead people to view an incorrect claim as true purely because they can recall it easily. In an experiment conducted by Lisa Fazio at Vanderbilt University, people who were asked to repeat the claim "a sari is a kilt" six times were found to believe this blatant falsehood more than those who repeated it only once. Journalism can turn itself into a vector for falsehoods to become believed by covering them uncritically. Media coverage of conspiracies around Barack Obama's place of birth, for instance, may have played a role in spreading a belief that the former U.S. President was not actually born in Hawaii.

Fact-checking itself, it should be noted, is an imperfect instrument. Something can be 100% accurate, and yet still leave out important context.[10] Facts are invariably constructed, ordered and reordered meaningfully within broader narrative structures which can provide different significance to the same basic facts. The truth, moreover, is more than a collection of facts. Fact-checking is not a tool to be deployed to shut down alternative interpretations as much as underwriting a series of facts that can impact on narrative and individual predispositions, so as to ground rational debate.

Module aims

- To improve familiarity with emerging good practice in fact-checking globally
- To raise awareness of the cognitive biases that can get in the way of factual understanding.
- To improve critical analysis skills

10 See example Yanofsky, D.(2013). *The chart Tim Cook doesn't want you to see*. Available at https://qz.com/122921/the-chart-tim-cook-doesnt-want-you-to-see/.

Learning outcomes

1. An understanding of the emergence of fact-checking as a distinct form of journalism as well as the ethics and methodology of the practice
2. An understanding of the questions to ask when assessing the quality of evidence
3. Improved capacity to distinguish fact-checkable claims from opinions and hyperbole
4. A basic conceptualisation of the cognitive biases that can get in the way of factual understanding

Module Format

The theoretical track of this lesson looks at:

1. History and semantics
2. Methodology and ethics
3. What gets in the way of facts.

The practical track is divided into two activities

1. Finding fact-checkable claims
2. Finding the facts

The assignment is focused on correcting the record.

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A. Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
1. History and semantics	20 mins	1
2. Methodologuy and ethics	20 mins	1
3. What gets in the way of facts	20 mins	4

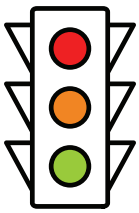
B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Activity 1: Finding fact-checkable claims	30 mins	3
Activity 2: Finding the facts	1 hour	2

i) Finding fact-checkable claims

Fact-checking concentrates on claims that contain at least one fact or figure whose truthfulness can be objectively verified. Fact-checking does not assess the truthfulness of opinions and predictions, hyperbole, satire and jokes.

Activity 1: Have students read the following excerpts of speeches by four public figures and highlight in one colour the factual (GREEN) statements that could be fact-checked, in another the opinions that can't be (RED) and in a third colour the parts that lie somewhere in between (ORANGE). After the students have handed in their annotated excerpts, walk through each of them and discuss what makes for a "fact-checkable" claim.



GUIDE

Red – statements can't be fact checked

Orange – statements are in between

Green – statements can be fact checked

Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile

While we have made significant progress in that direction, we are aware that we must address another threat to marine ecosystems — plastics. Year after year, 8 million tons of plastic make their way to the ocean, remaining there for hundreds of years and making a huge negative impact. To tackle that problem, we participate in the Clean Seas campaign of the United Nations Environment Programme. Meanwhile, at the local level, we will present a draft bill to ban the use of plastic bags in coastal cities within 12 months. That law will permit citizens to contribute to the protection of the oceans. We will thus be the first country in America to implement that type of law, and we call on other countries to assume that responsibility. Additionally, it is now 30 years since the adoption of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which enabled the ozone layer to recover. On this thirtieth anniversary, I would like to announce that my country has just deposited its ratification of the 2016 Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, which aims to prevent 0.5°C of global warming. Chile thereby becomes one of the first countries to ratify that new agreement. But that is not all. With the creation of a network of parks in Patagonia, we have also added 4.5

million hectares of green areas, rich in biodiversity, which will now be protected by the State for public use.

Jacob Zuma, former President of South Africa

The current structure of the global economy continues to deepen the divide between the global north and global south. While a few enjoy the benefits of globalisation, the majority of the peoples of the world still live in abject poverty and hunger, with no hope of ever improving their living conditions. Even within the developed countries, the gap between rich and poor remains wide and is of serious concern. We need the political will and commitment from global leaders to address the challenges and obstacles posed by this untransformed structure of the global economy, if we hope to achieve the goals and ambitions of Agenda 2030. These unequal and unjust economic power relations manifest themselves sharply in Africa. For example, our continent is endowed with mineral resources, but it still has the highest number of least developed countries.

Sigmar Gabriel, former Foreign Minister of Germany

We have to provide the United Nations with the means it needs to fulfil its mandate. At present, however, the figures tell a different story:

The World Food Programme receives less than 50% of the funding needed to combat the world's hunger crises today. The World Development Programme receives a mere 15% of its contributions as voluntary, non-tied payments today, in 2011 it was still 50%. And things do not look any better with respect to other UN aid programmes.

It cannot be that those in positions of responsibility at the United Nations spend more time distributing begging letters to find the necessary funding than in organising effective assistance. We have to change course here. We have to grant the United Nations the right level of funding as well as more freedom. In return, we need more efficiency and transparency with regard to how the funding is used.

Germany, at any rate, intends to maintain its financial support for the United Nations.

As the fourth biggest provider of assessed contributions and far beyond that, for example as one of the biggest donors of humanitarian assistance around the world, we want to continue making a substantial input.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook

Facebook is an idealistic and optimistic company. For most of our existence, we focused on all the good that connecting people can bring. As Facebook has grown, people everywhere have gotten a powerful new tool to stay connected to the people they love,

make their voices heard, and build communities and businesses. Just recently, we've seen the #metoo movement and the March for Our Lives, organized, at least in part, on Facebook. After Hurricane Harvey, people raised more than $20 million for relief. And more than 70 million small businesses now use Facebook to grow and create jobs.

ii) Finding the facts

Activity 2: Break the class into groups. Have each group choose one "green" claim from the ones listed above to fact-check (or choose from a list of your own).

Ask the groups to search for evidence that backs up or refutes the findings. Before they do so, encourage them to evaluate the sources they find according to the following parameters.

Proximity: How close is the evidence to the phenomenon? *E.g. A news organisation reporting the latest unemployment statistics is usually less proximate to the data — and therefore less valuable — than the national statistical body that actually measures employment figures.*

Expertise: What credentials indicate the quality of the producer of the evidence? *E.g. The author of a book has a PhD in the topic and is highly cited in his/her field.*

Rigour: How was the evidence collected? *E.g. Data on violence against women is often collected by survey.*[11] *This can make generalisations invalid, and international comparisons difficult given that women's willingness to respond and conceptualisation of sexual harassment may vary including from country to country. This is not to diminish the seriousness of violence against women, but to advocate for rigour to underpin specific claims being made.*

Transparency: What do you know about the evidence? *E.g. A scientific study has published all the data on which it bases its conclusions online for other researchers to scrutinise.*

Reliability: Is there a track record to evaluate? *E.g. Transparency International has been publishing the Corruption Perceptions Index for more than 20 years. This has given plenty of time to experts to spot its limitations.*[12]

11 See indicator (48) of the UN Gender Statistics https://genderstats.un.org/#/downloads

12 Hough, D. (2016) *Here's this year's (flawed) Corruption Perception Index. Those flaws are useful.* The Washington Post. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/27/how-do-you-measure-corruption-transparency-international-does-its-best-and-thats-useful/?utm_term=.7ff90ea2890f.

Conflict of interest: Is a source's personal or private interest also served by the evidence being what it is? *E.g. A study on the alleged health benefits of pasta was partly conducted and funded by a major pasta-maker.*[13]

Instructors may want to print the following table and have students use it to evaluate each source.

	Poor	Medium	Strong
Proximity			
Expertise			
Rigour			
Transparency			
Reliability			
Conflict of Interest			

Suggested Assignment

Correcting the record

Using the evidence evaluated in the tutorial, participants should write a fact check report (approximately 1200 words), reaching a conclusion on the relative truthfulness of the statement they chose.

They should develop their own ratings scale to grade the fact-checked claim. For example, PolitiFact hands out the following ratings:

True – The statement is accurate and there's nothing significant missing.
Mostly True – The statement is accurate but needs clarification or additional information.
Half True – The statement is partially accurate but leaves out important details or takes things out of context.
Mostly False – The statement contains some element of truth but ignores critical facts that would give a different impression.
False – The statement is not accurate.
Pants on Fire – The statement is not accurate and makes a ridiculous claim.

13 This is a real example. More here: https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/07/160704101101.htm.

Ratings scales do not have to be linear like the ones used by PolitiFact, where the ratings get progressively worse on a scale from True to Pants on Fire. For instance, *El Sabueso* in Mexico[14] includes ratings like "It can't be proven" for claims where there is not any evidence one way or another or "Debatable" for claims whose veracity depends on the methodology chosen. Encourage students to get creative with their scales as a way to address the range of qualifications that we can give to a statement of fact.
Depending on the time and resources available, instructors may also want to invite students to prepare the fact check in a format that goes beyond text. Memes, short videos, GIFs, Snapchat — all are potentially good instruments to fight falsehoods. In fact, one study even indicated that the same fact check is more effective when presented as a humorous video than as an article.[15]

For a few examples on creative formats, instructors may want to look at the following articles from Poynter:

Mantzarlis, A. (*2016*). *Fact-checkers experiment with Snapchat, GIFs and other stuff millennials* ❤. Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/fact-checkers-experiment-snapchat-gifs-and-other-stuff-millennials.

Mantzarlis, A. (*2016*). *How (and why) to turn a fact check into a GIF*. Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/how-and-why-turn-fact-check-gif.

Reading

In addition to the readings listed, Poynter has a dedicated fact-checking section available at https://www.poynter.org/channels/fact-checking that is updated several times a week. Here are some current, useful resources, primarily drawn from there.

Poynter (2018). *How to fact-check a politician's claim in 10 steps.*

Van Ess, H. (2017). *The ultimate guide to bust fake tweeters: A video toolkit in 10 steps* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/ultimate-guide-bust-fake-tweeters-video-toolkit-10-steps.

Mantzarlis, A. (2015). *5 things to keep in mind when fact-checking claim about science.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/5-things-keep-mind-when-fact-checking-claims-about-science.

14 AnimalPolitico (2015).

15 Young, D., Jamieson, K., Poulsen, S. and Goldring, A. (2017). *Fact-Checking Effectiveness as a Function of Format and Tone: Evaluating FactCheck.org and FlackCheck.org*. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 95(1), pp.49-75

Mantzarlis, A. (2016). *5 tips for fact-checking claims about health*. Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/5-tips-fact-checking-claims-about-health.

Mantzarlis, A. (2015). *5 tips for fact-checking datasets.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/5-tips-fact-checking-datasets.

Mantzarlis, A. (2015). *5 studies about fact-checking you may have missed last month* (Poynter). Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/5-studies-about-fact-checking-you-may-have-missed-last-month.

Mantzarlis, A. (2017). *Repetition boosts lies — but it could help fact-checkers too* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/repetition-boosts-lies-could-help-fact-checkers-too.

Mantzarlis, A. (2017). *French and American voters seem to respond to fact-checking in a similar way.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/french-and-american-voters-seem-respond-similar-way-fact-checking.

Funke, D. (2017). *Where there's a rumour, there's an audience. This study sheds light on why some take off.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2017/where-theres-a-rumor-theres-an-audience-this-study-sheds-light-on-why-some-take-off/.

Funke, D. (2017). *Want to be a better online sleuth? Learn to read webpages like a fact-checker.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/want-be-better-online-sleuth-learn-read-webpages-fact-checker.

Funke, D. (2017). *These two studies found that correcting misperceptions works. But it's not magic.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/these-two-studies-found-correcting-misperceptions-works-its-not-magic.

Mantzarlis, A. (2017). *What does the "Death of Expertise" mean for fact-checkers?* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/what-does-death-expertise-mean-fact-checkers.

Mantzarlis, A. (2017). *Journalism can't afford for corrections to be the next victim of the fake news frenzy.* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/journalism-cant-afford-corrections-be-next-victim-fake-news-frenzy.

Mantzarlis, A. (2016). *Should journalists outsource fact-checking to academics?* Available at https://www.poynter.org/news/should-journalists-outsource-fact-checking-academics.

Books

Ball, J. (2017). *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World*. London: Biteback Publishing.

Gladstone, B. (2017). *The Trouble with Reality: a Rumination on Moral Panic in Our Time*. New York: Workman Pu.

Graves, L. (2016). . *Deciding What's True: the Rise of Political Fact-Checking Movement in American Journalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Online resources

The International Fact-Checking Day role-playing card game lesson plan (designed for students aged 14-16) is available at the following link: http://factcheckingday.com/lesson-plan. The website also contains tip sheets, a link to an online course for university students and a reading list on facts and fact-checking.

SOCIAL MEDIA VERIFICATION: ASSESSING SOURCES AND VISUAL CONTENT

Tom Trewinnard and Fergus Bell

MODULE 6

This module is designed to help participants identify and verify the original source of digital information online. It will introduce different strategies for determining the authenticity of sources, photos and videos, especially User Generated Content (UGC) shared via social networks.

By the end of this module, participants should be aware of different types of false and misleading content often shared during breaking news events on platforms such as *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram* and *YouTube*[1]. Such content is periodically picked up and carried by otherwise reliable news organisations, serving to discredit them. It is also inadvertently redistributed and amplified on social networks by journalists, who are sometimes targeted by malicious actors with a view to influencing public debate[2] and leveraging reporters' credibility as trusted sources[3].

Participants are asked to test their instincts with real-world scenarios and examples, before putting into practice basic investigative techniques and strategies for verifying content, including:

- Identifying and crediting original sources in line with the ethical principles guiding journalistic use of User Generated Content[4]
- Identifying and excluding fake accounts or bots[5] [6]
- Confirming visual content is correctly attributed to the original source
- Verifying the recording and upload time of content
- Geolocating photos and video

Being able to identify and verify original content enables journalists to seek permission to publish User-Generated Content (UGC) in line with ethical and legal requirements.

Outline

The writers Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, in *The Elements of Journalism*[7] affirm: "In the end, the discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment,

1 Alejandro, J. (2010). *Journalism In The Age Of Social Media*. Reuters Institute Fellowship. Available at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/journalism-age-social-media.

2 Paulussen, S. & Harder, R. (2014). *Social Media References in Newspapers*. Journalism Practice, 8(5), pp.542-551.

3 Module Seven has a detailed discussion and treatment of this problem

4 See the Online News Association's UGC Ethics guide: https://ethics.journalists.org/topics/user-generated-content/.

5 Woolley, S.C. & Howard, P.N. (2017). *Computational Propaganda Worldwide: Executive Summary.* Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, Eds. Working Paper 2017.11. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda. comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk. Available at https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2017/06/Casestudies-ExecutiveSummary.pdf.

6 Joseph, R. (2018). Guide. *How to verify a Twitter account.* Africa Check. Available at https://africacheck.org/factsheets/guide-verify-twitter-account/.

7 Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect. New York: Crown Publishers.

propaganda, fiction, or art.... Journalism alone is focused first on getting what happened down right...". In this spirit, this Module examines the "discipline of verification" in current times.

Social media has changed journalism practice. Real-time audience engagement has given rise to crowdsourcing content, and even reporting tasks like verification can now be outsourced to the audience.[8] While journalism remains in essence, a discipline of verification[9], methods of verifying content and sources require constant updating to reflect the impacts of fast-changing digital technologies, online behaviours, and newsgathering practices. For example, during the Arab Spring, the concept of 'open verification' - a process of public, collaborative, real-time verification - began to surface. But this process remains contentious because of the risks associated with misinformation going viral in the course of attempting to verify information step-by-step in a public forum (i.e. a reporter sharing unverified information with a view to crowdsourcing the verification process).[10]

Today, eyewitness accounts and visual content are amongst the most important and compelling tools a journalist or news publisher can draw on to tell a high impact story. In a breaking news scenario, speed is a critical factor in verifying information from social media.[11]

Journalists must be able to navigate vast amounts of information to get to sources, information and images that matter. The rapid growth in the amount of visual content (photos, videos and GIFs) uploaded to social platforms, is driven by three main factors:

- The proliferation of camera-enabled smart and feature phones around the world[12]
- Increased access to inexpensive (and in some places, free) mobile data
- The rise of global social networks and social messaging platforms on which anyone can publish content and build an audience

In many breaking news scenarios, the first accounts, photos and video footage to emerge from an incident – be it a protest, a train crash, a hurricane, or a terrorist attack – are likely to be published by an eyewitness, participant or bystander with a smartphone. Techniques for verifying this content vary depending on newsrooms' resources, norms and standards, and journalists' own practices. This module will

8 Carvin, A. (2012). *Distant witness: Social Media's Journalism Revolution*. New York, NY: CUNY Journalism Press.

9 Kovach, B. & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). Op cit

10 Posetti, J. & Silverman, S. (2014). *When Good People Share Bad Things: The basics of social media verification* at Mediashift July 24th, 2014. Available: http://mediashift.org/2014/07/goodwhen-good-people-share-bad-things-the-basics-of-social-media-verification/.

11 Brandtzaeg, P., Lüders, M., Spangenberg, J., Rath-Wiggins, L. & Følstad, A. (2015). E*merging Journalistic Verification Practices Concerning Social Media.* Journalism Practice, 10(3), pp.323-342.

12 See Slide 5 of Mary Meeker's Internet Trends Report: https://www.slideshare.net/DanSchiffman/kleiner-perkins-internet-outlook.

introduce students to some best practice methods and online tools and resources, but as with the technology, tools are evolving rapidly.[13]

With any verification, some general guidelines, offered by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014)[14] apply:

- Edit with scepticism
- Keep an accuracy checklist
- Assume nothing – don't be misled by exploitation of signals associated with "truthiness"[15]
- Be cautious with anonymous sources.

By identifying the originator of information or images, and performing a system of checks on both the source and the content they have shared, you should find yourself in a position to verify them as the source, providing the checks give you the required outcomes.[16]

These checks replicate the work that a journalist might perform if they were physically present at the scene of a news event interviewing eyewitnesses. A journalist able to conduct an in-person interview would scrutinise the account of the eyewitness, follow up on important details and come to a conclusion about their reliability, based on fact-checking. Instinct can also be a partial guide – along with watching for behaviour clues. The process of confirming a source digitally must allow conclusions to be drawn, even if it is not possible to actually speak to a person directly, or in real-time.[17]

Many large newsrooms have teams and expensive technology, or agencies providing services, dedicated to finding this content as quickly as possible[18], while also acquiring the publishing and broadcast rights and verifying the content prior to publication. Most smaller newsrooms and many individual journalists do not have the same resources,[19] and rely on their own evolving, systematic methodology to determine trustworthiness.[20]

13 Schifferes, S., Newman, N., Thurman, N., Corney, D., Göker, A. & Martin, C. (2014). *Identifying and Verifying News through Social Media.* Digital Journalism, 2(3), pp.406-418.

14 Kovach & Rosenstiel (2014). Op cit.

15 Zimmer, B (2010). "Truthiness", The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/2017/magazine/2017FOB-onlanguage-t.html.

16 Bell, F. (2015). *Verification: Source vs Content* [*online*] *Medium*. Available at: https://medium.com/1st-draft/verficiation-source-vs-content-b67d6eed3ad0.

17 Kovach & Rosenstiel (2014). Op cit.

18 Diakopoulos N., De Choudhury M. & Naaman M. (2012). *Finding and assessing social media information sources in the context of journalism* Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings, , pp. 2451-2460. Available at: https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/2207676.2208409.

19 Schifferes, S., Newman, N., Thurman, N., Corney, D., Goker, A.S. & Martin, C. (2014). *Identifying and verifying news through social media: Developing a user-centred tool for professional journalists.* Digital Journalism, 2(3), pp. 406-418. Available at http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/3071/1/IDENTIFYING AND VERIFYING NEWS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA.pdf.

20 Brandtzaeg, P. B., Lüders, M., Spangenberg, J., Rath-Wiggins, L., & Følstad, A. (2016). *Emerging journalistic verification practices concerning social media.* Journalism Practice, 10(3), 323-342.

Why is verification of the source and visual content so important? Put simply: it is good journalism. In today's digital world, it is straightforward for ill-intentioned actors to create and share convincing and difficult to detect fakery. There are many cases where professional journalists and newsrooms have damaged their reputation by sharing or republishing misleading information, photos or videos or information from fake persons. At times, they have also misinterpreted satirical content, sharing or publishing it as fact.[21]

The problem is compounded by the volume of visual content available online, all of which can be stripped of context and recycled in future news events, as we see happen daily around the world with hoaxers tricking politicians and professional journalists alike.

There are, however, numerous steps that can be taken to assess the credibility of a given source who has a story to tell, or content to share. Important questions should be asked, some directly, some answered by using the evidence available through investigation. Verification tools can be used to establish where a source has posted from, but it is also possible to manually triangulate a source by analysing their social media history to check for clues that could indicate the feasibility of them being in a particular place at a particular time. Examining the history of their interactions with other users and checking linked content within posts also assists in the manual verification process and can help eliminate information shared by bots.

Sceptical editing is essential, but the vast majority of individuals who get caught up in news events and share their stories are not looking to deceive - they are just sharing their experiences. If misinformation arises, it may not be malicious. Instead it could simply be that the individual cannot remember the events properly or has perhaps chosen to embellish the story. This could also occur if you had the opportunity to conduct a physical, in-person interview, as is frequently borne out in conflicting reports and statements from the scenes of crimes or accidents, where the accounts of traumatised witnesses or victims can vary considerably.

While it might not be possible to ascertain with full certainty the provenance of visual content, there are a number of "red flags" that can be uncovered through a simple verification process that asks:

- Is the content original, or has it been "scraped" from previous reporting and re-appropriated misleadingly?
- Has the content been digitally manipulated in some way[22]

21 Deutsche Welle (2018) *Germany's Bild falls for hoax and unleashes fake news debate* (22/02/2018) Available at http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-bild-falls-for-hoax-unleashes-debate-on-fake-news/a-42704014.

22 Student survivors of the mass shooting at a school in Parkland, Florida, USA, who organised a successful national protest for gun control, featured in manipulated images spread on partisan social media channels https://www.buzzfeed.com/janelytvynenko/here-are-the-hoaxes-and-conspiracies-still-going-around?utm_term=.euy6NPayy#.jhe2YvV44.

- Can we confirm the time and place of the photo/video capture, using available metadata?
- Can we confirm the time and place of the photo/video capture, using visual clues in the content?

To find red flags efficiently, we also need to understand the different types of common false or misleading visual content:

- **Wrong time/wrong place:** the most common type of misleading visuals are old visuals that are being re-shared with new claims about what they show. Virality in such cases is often caused by accidental sharing, of content that can be easy to debunk, but not easy to pull back[23]
- **Manipulated content:** content that has been digitally manipulated using photo or video editing software
- **Staged content:** original content that has been created or shared with the intent of misleading[24]

In this module, students will be introduced to basic tools and techniques to learn and practice source and content verification (slides, including instructors notes, and additional reading provided) such as:[25]

Facebook account analysis: Using an online tool from Intel Techniques[26] you can find out more about a source by analysing their Facebook account.

Twitter account analysis: Using this guide from Africa Check you can find out more about the source by analysing their social history and thereby identify whether it is a bot tweeting.[27]

Reverse Image Search: Using either Google Reverse Image Search[28], TinEye[29] or RevEye[30], you can check to see if an image is being recycled to support a new claim or event. Reverse image search lets you see if one or more image databases (with billions of images) contain an earlier version of the image. If reverse image search shows an

23 This video claiming to be evidence of a flood at Bengaluru International Airport in India was in fact a rehashed video from a flood at a Mexican airport. https://www.thequint.com/news/webqoof/fake-video-claiming-bengaluru-airport-was-flooded-is-from-mexico.

24 Artificial intelligence and sophisticated video editing tools make it difficult to discern fake videos, as this footage of Barack Obama shows: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmUC4m6w1wo.

25 Note that news tools continue to evolve and the instructor, together with the learners can discover and test these technologies and techniques.

26 Available at: https://inteltechniques.com/tools/Facebook.html.

27 Joseph (2018). Op cit

28 *How to do a Google Reverse Image Search*: https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?hl=en.

29 Go to https://www.tineye.com/.

30 http://squobble.blogspot.co.uk/2009/12/chromeeye-tineye-extension-for-google.html.

image existing before a claimed event, this is a major red flag and it is likely the image is recycled from an earlier event. If reverse image search does not return any results, this does not mean the image is original, and you still need to do additional checks.

YouTube Data Viewer: There is no publicly available "reverse video search" - but tools like Amnesty's YouTube Data Viewer[31], InVID[32] and NewsCheck[33] can detect video thumbnails for YouTube videos, and a reverse image search on those thumbnails can reveal if earlier versions of the video have been uploaded. (Tools also show the exact time of upload.)

EXIF Viewer: EXIF is metadata attached to visual content that includes a wide range of data points created by digital cameras and phone cameras at the point of capture. These can include exact time and date, location metadata, device data, and light setting information. EXIF metadata is thus extremely helpful in the verification process, but a major limitation is that social networks strip the metadata from visual content. This means images shared on Twitter or Facebook will not display EXIF data. If, however, you are able to contact the uploader and acquire the original image file, you can use EXIF data to verify the content. It is also important to note that EXIF data can be modified, so further verification is required.

Participants will get a basic introduction to more advanced techniques, with additional resources for further reading and case studies provided. These techniques include:

- **Geolocation:** Geolocation is the process of determining where a video or image was captured. This can be straightforward if adequate metadata is available: EXIF data from mobile phones often reveals coordinates, and social content (on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, for example) is occasionally geotagged (though it is important to note that such metadata is editable and can be misleading). Often, geolocation requires cross-referencing visual characteristics and landmarks from the content with satellite imagery, street-view imagery and visual content available from other sources (such as other visual content posted to Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube).
- **Weather corroboration:** Sources such as WolframAlpha[34] can reveal historical weather data, allowing us to check if the weather observable in visual content is corroborated by the historical record. (i.e. Is the video showing rain on a day no rain was observed by meteorological sources?)

31 *How to use Amnesty's YouTube Data Viewer*: https://citizenevidence.amnestyusa.org/.

32 InVid video verification tool available at: http://www.invid-project.eu/tools-and-services/invid-verification-plugin/.

33 *About NewsCheck*: https://firstdraftnews.org/launching-new-chrome-extension-newscheck/.

34 WolframAlpha tools available at https://www.wolframalpha.com/examples/science-and-technology/weather-and-meteorology/.

- **Shadow analysis:** One line of investigation into a photo or video is to examine the internal consistency of any visible shadows (i.e. are there shadows where we would expect them to be, and are any visible shadows consistent with relevant light sources?)
- **Image forensics:** Some tools are able to detect inconsistencies in image metadata that suggest manipulation. The validity of these techniques is highly subject to the context and application, but tools such as Forensically[35], Photo Forensics[36] and IziTru[37] can carry out clone detection and error level analysis that could provide useful insights.

Module Aims

- To increase awareness of the role of User Generated Content (UGC) shared via social networks in contemporary journalism, along with the risks and pitfalls associated with relying on it
- To achieve a broad understanding of the importance of securing access and information from the primary source in a story and the process to do so
- To extend understanding of the need to verify UGC content, and exclude different types of fake and misleading content
- To increase awareness of the basic methods used to verify images and video, and debunk false visual content

Learning Outcomes

1. A deeper understanding of the role of UGC in contemporary journalism
2. Understanding the need for verification of digital content
3. Awareness of, and a technical understanding of, how to use tools to verify an original source
4. The ability to conduct basic verification steps for photo and video content
5. Awareness of more advanced techniques and metadata that can be used in verification processes
6. Awareness of the need to seek permission to use UGC and other online content and the knowledge of how to do so

35 Wagner, J. (2015). *Forensically, Photo Forensics for the Web*. [Blog] 29a.ch. Available at: https://29a.ch/2015/08/16/forensically-photo-forensics-for-the-web.

36 Fotoforensics tools available at: http://fotoforensics.com/.

37 Izitru tools available at: https://www.izitru.com/.

Module Format

This module is presented as a 60-minute theoretical lecture and a 120-minute, three-part practical demonstration. However, the practical nature of the subject, lends itself to a longer form interactive workshop with practical exercises to supplement the demonstrations.

Theoretical: Using the notes above, design a lecture dealing with verification as an integral but evolving part of journalism's method in the digital age.

Practical: The 120-minute practical session lends itself to an interactive demonstration and workshop. It can be divided into three distinct parts.

Educators should use the notes above and work through the slides which can be download from the following links. Note there are additional instructor notes attached to the slides:

i. **Source identification and verification.** Checking social history of sources: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_fake_news_curriculum_verification_digital_sources_one.pdf

ii. **Basic image verification.** Common types of false imagery and basic verification steps: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_fake_news_curriculum_verification_digital_sources_two.pdf

iii. **More advanced** verification. Approaches for content analysis, including metadata analysis and geolocation: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_fake_news_curriculum_verification_digital_sources_three.pdf

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A. Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
Lecture: Background & theory on verification and evolution of methods	1 hour	1, 2, 6

B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
i) Source verification - social (Exercise)	30 mins	2, 3
ii) Reverse Image Search (Demonstration & exercise)	15 mins	2, 3, 4
ii) Analysing video (Demonstration)	30 mins	2, 3, 4
iii) Introduction to different types of metadata (Demonstration)	15 mins	2, 5
iii) Geolocation (Demonstration + exercise)	20 mins	2, 4, 5
iii) Weather, shadows and image forensics (Demonstration)	10 mins	2, 4, 5

Suggested Assignment

- Participants should design a source verification workflow using the generic template in slide 8 of the first slide deck. Participants should either use a real role, place they work, or a news organisation that they are familiar with.
- Select a connected social media account of a popular person and ask participants to use the tools demonstrated to determine whether they are genuine accounts and to identify any related but not authentic accounts.
- Select and share an image file with the class and ask them to identify certain pieces of information by running it through an online EXIF viewer and a Reverse Image Search tool in order to tell you the original source.

Materials

Slides

1. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_fake_news_curriculum_verification_digital_sources_one.pdf
2. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_fake_news_curriculum_verification_digital_sources_two.pdf
3. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_fake_news_curriculum_verification_digital_sources_three.pdf

Reading

Source verification

Ayala Iacucci, A. (2014). *Case Study 3.1: Monitoring and Verifying During the Ukrainian Parliamentary Election, Verification Handbook*. European Journalism Centre. Available at: http://verificationhandbook.com/book/chapter3.1.php.

Bell, F. (2015). *Verification: Source vs.* Content, First Draft News. Available at: https://medium.com/1st-draft/verification-source-vs-content-b67d6eed3ad0.

Carvin, A. (2013), *Distant Witness*, CUNY Journalism Press. Available at: http://press.journalism.cuny.edu/book/distant-witness-social-media-the-arab-spring-and-a-journalism-revolution/.

Toler, A. (2017). *Advanced guide on verifying video content.* Available at: *https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/how-tos/2017/06/30/advanced-guide-verifying-video-content/.*

Trewinnard, T. (2016). *Source verification: Beware the bots, First Draft News.* Available at: https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/source-verification-beware-the-bots/.

Video

Real or Fake: How to verify what you see on the internet. (2015). France24. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8su4chuU3M&feature=yout.

Knight, W. (2018). *The Defense Department has produced the first tools for catching deepfakes*, MIT Technology Review. https://www.technologyreview.com/s/611726/the-defense-department-has-produced-the-first-tools-for-catching-deepfakes/.

Eyewitness Media

Brown, P. (2015). *A global study of eyewitness media in online newspaper sites.* Eyewitness Media Hub. Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/user-generated-content/.

Hermida, A. (2013). *#JOURNALISM*. Digital Journalism, 1(3), pp.295-313.

Koettl, C. (2016, January 27). *Citizen Media Research and Verification: An Analytical Framework for Human Rights Practitioners*. Centre of Governance and Human Rights, University of Cambridge. Available at https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/a481644f-c1ff-4c71-896f-85e64d156cb0.

Kuczerawy, A. (2016, December 16). *Pants on fire: content verification tools and other ways to deal with the fake news problem*.

Novak, M. (n.d.). *69 Viral Images From 2016 That Were Totally Fake*. Available at https://gizmodo.com/69-viral-images-from-2016-that-were-totally-fake-1789400518.

Online News Association: UGC Ethics Guide https://ethics.journalists.org/topics/user-generated-content/.

Pierre-Louis, K. (2017). *You're probably terrible at spotting faked photos*. Available at https://www.popsci.com/fake-news-manipulated-photo.

Rohde, D. (2013). *Pictures That Change History: Why the World Needs Photojournalists.* The Atlantic. Available at https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/pictures-that-change-history-why-the-world-needs-photojournalists/282498/.

Shapiro, I., Brin, C., Bédard-Brûlé, I. & Mychajlowcz, K. (2013) *Verification as a Strategic Ritual: How journalists retrospectively describe processes for ensuring accuracy*, published in Journalism Practice, 7(6).

Smidt, J. L., Lewis, C. & Schmidt, R. (2017). *Here's A Running List Of Misinformation About Hurricane Irma.* Available at https://www.buzzfeed.com/janelytvynenko/irma-misinfo/.

Wardle, C. (2015). *7/7: Comparing the use of eyewitness media 10 years on*. Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/77-comparing-the-use-of-eyewitness-media-10-years-on/.

Wardle, C., Dubberley, S., & Brown, P. (2017). *Amateur Footage: A Global Study of User-Generated Content in TV and Online News Output*. Available at https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D88S526V.

Zdanowicz, C. (2014). *"Miracle on the Hudson" Twitpic changed his life*. Available at http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/15/tech/hudson-landing-twitpic-krums/index.html.

Reverse Image Search

First Draft News. *Visual Verification Guide - Photos* -. Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FDN_verificationguide_photos.pdf?x47084.

First Draft News. *Visual Verification Guide - Video* -. Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FDN_verificationguide_videos.pdf?x47084.

Suibhne, E. (2015). *Baltimore "looting" tweets show importance of quick and easy image checks.* Available at https://medium.com/1st-draft/baltimore-looting-tweets-show-importance-of-quick-and-easy-image-checks-a713bbcc275e.

Seitz, J. (2015). *Manual Reverse Image Search With Google and TinEye*. Available at https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/how-tos/2015/05/08/manual-reverse-image-search-with-google-and-tineye/.

YouTube Data Viewer

First Draft News. (n.d.). *Using YouTube Data Viewer to check the upload time of a video* -. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YS7YWnoYwo.

Toler, A. (2017). *Advanced Guide on Verifying Video Content*. Available at https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/how-tos/2017/06/30/advanced-guide-verifying-video-content/.

Metadata Analysis

Honan, M. (2012). *How Trusting in Vice Led to John McAfee's Downfall.* Available at https://www.wired.com/2012/12/how-vice-got-john-mcafee-caught/.

Storyful. (2014). *Verifying images: why seeing is not always believing*.

Wen, T. (2017). *The hidden signs that can reveal a fake photo.* Available at http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170629-the-hidden-signs-that-can-reveal-if-a-photo-is-fake.

Content Analysis

Ess, H. van. (2017). *Inside the trenches of an information war.*. Medium. Available at https://medium.com/@henkvaness/how-to-date-a-mysterious-missile-launcher-78352ca8c3c3.

First Draft News. (2016). *Watch Eliot Higgins demonstrate advanced verification techniques at #FDLive*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7zvsXv2ECI&list=PLon8am2uBRCDS8-4WP7EiyGQQgYW7sEoV&index=2.

Higgins, E. (2015, July 24). *Searching the Earth: Essential geolocation tools for verification.* Available at https://medium.com/1st-draft/searching-the-earth-essential-geolocation-tools-for-verification-89d960bb8fba.

Online resources

First Draft Interactive: Geolocation Challenge. Available at https://ftp.firstdraftnews.org/articulate/glch318/story_html5.html.

First Draft Interactive: Observation Challenge. Available at https://ftp.firstdraftnews.org/articulate/2020/en/Oc20/story_html5.html.

First Draft Online Verification Course. Available at https://firstdraftnews.org/training/verification/.

COMBATTING ONLINE ABUSE: WHEN JOURNALISTS AND THEIR SOURCES ARE TARGETED

Julie Posetti

MODULE 7

Synopsis

The problem of disinformation and misinformation[1] undermining credible journalism and reliable information has escalated dramatically in the social media era. Consequences include the deliberate targeting of journalists and other online publishers, along with their sources, who are seeking to verify or share information and commentary. The associated risks can further undermine trust in journalism, along with the safety of journalists and their sources.

In some instances, journalists have been targeted in acts of 'astroturfing'[2] and 'trolling'[3] - deliberate attempts to "mislead, misinform, befuddle, or endanger journalists"[4] with the sharing of information designed to distract and misdirect them, or their potential sources. Alternatively, journalists might be targeted to trick them into sharing inaccurate information which feeds a false interpretation of the facts or, when it is revealed as fake, diminishes the credibility of the journalist (and the news organisation with which they are affiliated). In other cases, they face digital threats designed to expose their sources, breach their privacy to expose them to risk, or access their unpublished data.

There is also the phenomenon of governments mobilising 'digital hate squads' to chill critical commentary and quash freedom of expression.[5] Then, there is the serious problem of online harassment and violence (sometimes problematically labelled as 'trolling'[6]) disproportionately experienced by women and frequently misogynistic in nature. This can see journalists, their sources, and commentators subjected to torrents of online abuse, false claims about their conduct, misrepresentation of their identities, or threats of harm designed to humiliate them and undermine their confidence, discredit them, divert their attention and, ultimately, to chill their reporting.[7] Meanwhile in many places, physical world abuse designed to suppress critical reporting continues, with the added danger of now being fuelled by online incitement and intimidation.

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1 For definitions, see: Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking* (Council of Europe). https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c.

2 'Astroturfing' is a term derived from a brand of fake grass used to carpet outdoor surfaces to create the impression it is natural grass cover. In the context of disinformation, it involves spreading fake information, targeting audiences and journalists with an intention to redirect or mislead them, particularly in the form of 'evidence' of faux popular support for a person, idea or policy. See also Technopedia definition: https://www.techopedia.com/definition/13920/astroturfing.

3 Coco, G. (2012). *Why Does Nobody Know What Trolling Means? A quick reference guide for the media* at Vice.com. https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/ppqk78/what-trolling-means-definition-UK-newspapers.

4 Posetti, J. (2013). *The 'Twitterisation' of investigative journalism* in S. Tanner & N. Richardson (Eds.), Journalism Research and Investigation in a Digital World (pp. 88-100): Oxford University Press, Melbourne. https://ro.uow.edu.au/articles/chapter/The_twitterisation_of_investigative_journalism/27777093.

5 Riley M, Etter, L and Pradhan, B (2018) *A Global Guide To State-Sponsored Trolling*, Bloomberg: https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-government-sponsored-cyber-militia-cookbook/.

6 Note: 'Trolling' in its internet-related application refers to acts that range from gentle teasing, tricking and goading to deliberate deception. However, it is increasingly deployed as a term to cover all acts of online abuse. This is potentially problematic as it conflates a wide range of activities and potentially underplays the seriousness of online harassment.

7 See for example: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/twitter-maggie-haberman-new-york-times-quits-social-media-jack-dorsey-a8459121.html

Journalists can be direct victims of disinformation campaigns, but they are also pushing back. In addition to strengthening digital defences, many are proactively exposing these attacks and uncovering the attackers. Engaging in Media and Information Literacy initiatives along with NGOs in this space, news media are also playing a role in educating the public about why journalism is worth cherishing and protecting.

Outline

Teasing out the issues

i) Recognising and Responding to 'Trolling' and 'Astroturfing'[8]

This phenomenon includes fabrication of characters and events designed to trick journalists and audiences, along with organised social media campaigns aimed at mimicking organic public reaction. It can be difficult to differentiate breaking news and legitimate witness accounts from content that has been faked or peppered with inaccuracies to deliberately mislead or undermine the credibility of journalists and other online commentators, along with their work, by duping them into sharing false information.

Examples of this kind of behaviour include:

- The fabrication of disaster victims and terrorist attack casualties (see Manchester bombings example[9]) to fool people into sharing content that potentially damages the reputation and/or credibility of individuals, including journalists, who might be tagged in the distribution process.
- The publication of content parading as newsworthy produced by fictitious characters such as the 'Gay girl in Damascus'[10]. In 2011, the world's media clamoured to report the arrest of the blogger who was purportedly a Syrian lesbian - the author turned out to be a U.S. student based outside the country. Journalist Jess Hill was assigned to the story for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's PM programme. She says traditional verification values and methods prevented her programme from amplifying a falsehood. "We didn't report her arrest, for one simple reason – we couldn't find anyone who had actually met her in person. No relatives, no personal friends. We spent two days looking for people, asking our Syrian contacts to refer us to people who may have had contact with her, but each lead became a dead end. The fact that we couldn't find anyone who had actually met her set off major alarm bells, so we didn't report it... News agencies who rushed to

8 For an explanation of 'astroturfing' useful for teaching purposes, the following link is of value: https://youtu.be/Fmh4RdIwswE

9 Manchester bombing example, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/26/the-story-behind-the-fake-manchester-attack-victims.

10 Young, K. (2017). *How to Hoax Yourself: The Case of the Gay Girl in Damascus,* November 9th, 2017, in The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-to-hoax-yourself-gay-girl-in-damascus.

report that story didn't do the basic job of going back to the source. They reported news based on an entry on a blog."[11]

Other motivations include the desire to redirect or distract journalists from an investigation by prompting fruitless lines of inquiry that stymie reporting efforts and, ultimately, have a chilling effect on truth-seeking.

Examples of this style of misdirection include:

- The attempted reframing of claims about the size of the crowd at Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017 as 'alternative facts'[12]
- Contemporary wartime propaganda, e.g. the Taliban tweeting at journalists in Afghanistan with false and misleading details of battles.[13]
- Datasets handed to journalists that provide some verifiable public interest-value information but have been corrupted by disinformation in the mix.

More recently, computational propaganda[14] has increased the risks for journalists dealing with 'astroturfing' and 'trolling'. This involves the use of bots to disseminate well-targeted false information and propaganda messages on a scale designed to look like an organic movement.[15] Concurrently, AI technology is being leveraged to create 'deepfake'[16] videos and other forms of content designed to discredit the targets, including journalists, and especially female reporters.

Examples of these practices include:

- Independent news site Rappler.com and its largely female staff were targeted in a campaign of prolific online abuse. "In the Philippines, paid trolls, fallacious reasoning, leaps in logic, poisoning the well – these are only some of the propaganda techniques that have helped shift public opinion on key issues."[17] (see expanded discussion below)

11 Posetti, J. (2013). op cit

12 NBC News (2017) Video: https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/conway-press-secretary-gave-alternative-facts-860142147643.

13 Cunningham, E (2011). *In shift, Taliban embrace new media*, GlobalPost. https://www.pri.org/stories/2011-05-21/shift-taliban-embrace-new-media.

14 Woolley, S. & Howard, P. (2017). *Computational Propaganda Worldwide: Executive Summary,* Working Paper No. 2017.11 (Oxford University). https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2017/06/Casestudies-ExecutiveSummary.pdf.

15 Note: Shallow reports about bot campaigns during the 2017 UK general election highlight the difficulty of reporting on these issues. C.f. Dias, N. (2017). *Reporting on a new age of digital astroturfing,* First Draft News. https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/digital-astroturfing/.

16 The term deepfake is a portmanteau of 'deep learning' and 'fake'. It involves AI technology in the creation of fraudulent content, sometimes of a pornographic nature, that is virtually undetectable. It is used in cyberattacks to discredit people, including journalists. See: Cuthbertson, A (2018) *What is 'deepfake' porn? AI brings face-swapping to disturbing new level* in Newsweek http://www.newsweek.com/what-deepfake-porn-ai-brings-face-swapping-disturbing-new-level-801328.

17 Ressa, M. (2016). *Propaganda War: Weaponising the Internet*, Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/nation/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet.

- A wealthy family accused of capturing key state enterprises and politicians in South Africa hired UK Public Relations firm Bell Pottinger to devise an elaborate propaganda campaign. It spread its messages via a disinformation empire involving websites, media and a paid Twitter army which targeted journalists, business people and politicians with abusive, hostile messages and photoshopped images, designed to humiliate and counter their investigations into state capture.[18] Prominent editor Ferial Haffajee was targeted in a campaign of online harassment during this period, which saw her image manipulated to create false impressions of her character, alongside deployment of the hashtag #presstitute[19]
- The case of journalist Rana Ayyub elicited a call by five United Nations special rapporteurs for the Indian government to provide protection, following the mass circulation of false information aimed to counter her critical reporting. The independent journalist had been on the receiving end of a combination of disinformation about her on social media, including 'deepfake' videos that falsely suggested she had made pornographic films, as well as direct rape and death threats[20]
- The case of Finnish journalist, Jessikka Aro, discussed under 'Digital Safety Threats and Defensive Strategies' in section ii) of this module.

Other modules in this handbook deal specifically with technical verification techniques, but it is important to enable participants to identify the malicious motivation of some online operators in the creation, distribution and targeting of journalists with disinformation and misinformation as part of a pattern of abuse.

Critical questions to add to technical methods of information verification:

1. Could there be malicious intent behind this share or tag?
2. What does the person posting the content stand to gain by sharing?
3. What could be the consequences for me/my professional credibility/a news media institution or employer if I share it?
4. Have I worked hard enough to ascertain this individual's identity/affiliations/reliability/motivations (e.g. are they seeking to seed disinformation or profit from the sale of content acquired illegally without public interest justification)?

18 Extensive dossier on the Gupta's 'fake news empire' available at https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-09-04-the-guptas-bell-pottinger-and-the-fake-news-propaganda-machine/.

19 Haffajee, F. (2017). *Ferial Haffajee: The Gupta fake news factory and me*. HuffPost South Africa. [online] Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/ferial-haffajee-the-gupta-fake-news-factory-and-me_uk_5c7eaa44e4b078abc6c24e7f.

20 *UN experts call on India to protect journalist Rana Ayyub from online hate campaign* http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23126&LangID=E; See also Ayyub, R. (2018). *In India, journalists face slut-shaming and rape threats*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/opinion/india-journalists-slut-shaming-rape.html.

5. Is this a human or bot?

6. If you receive a 'data dump' from a purported whistleblower, should you independently verify the contents before publishing the dataset in full? Is it possible that it is peppered with disinformation and misinformation designed to deliberately mislead or discredit?

ii) Digital Safety Threats and Defensive Strategies

Journalists, human rights defenders and bloggers/social media activists are increasingly vulnerable to cyber-attacks, and their data or sources may be compromised by malicious actors including through phishing, malware attacks, and identity spoofing.[21]

An example of this practice:

Award-winning investigative journalist Jessikka Aro, who works for Finland's public broadcaster YLE, has been the target of organised 'troll' campaigns since 2014. She has experienced digital safety threats including spoofing and doxing[22], with trolls disclosing her personal contact information and spreading disinformation about her, rendering her messaging apps and inboxes full of angry messages. *"I received a phone call in which someone fired a gun. Later, someone texted me, claiming to be my dead father and told me he was 'observing' me,"* she says.[23] Aro has expressed appreciation for editors who protect journalists from threats and urged journalists to investigate and expose propaganda.

It is therefore important for journalistic actors to be alert to the following threats:

12 key digital security threats[24]

- Targeted surveillance and mass surveillance
- Software and hardware exploits without the knowledge of the target
- Phishing attacks[25]
- Fake domain attacks

21 From Technopedia: Spoofing is a fraudulent or malicious practice in which communication is sent from an unknown source disguised as a source known to the receiver. Email spoofing is the most common form of this practice. A spoofed email may also contain additional threats like Trojans or other viruses. These programmes can cause significant computer damage by triggering unexpected activities, remote access, deletion of files and more https://www.techopedia.com/definition/5398/spoofing.

22 From Technopedia: Doxing is the process of retrieving, hacking and publishing other people's information such as names, addresses, phone numbers and credit card details. Doxing may be targeted toward a specific person or an organisation. There are many reasons for doxing, but one of the most popular is coercion. Doxing is a slang term that is derived from the word ".doc" because documents are often retrieved and shared. Hackers have developed different ways to dox, but one of the most common methods is by obtaining the victim's email and then uncovering the password to open their account to obtain more personal information. https://www.techopedia.com/definition/29025/doxing.

23 Aro, J. 2016. *The cyberspace war: propaganda and trolling as warfare tools.* European View. Sage Journals, June 2016, Volume 15, Issue 1. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1007/s12290-016-0395-5.

24 Posetti, J. (2015). New Study: *Combatting the rising threats to journalists' digital safety* (WAN-IFRA). https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2015/03/27/new-study-combatting-the-rising-threats-to-journalists-digital-safety.

25 King, G (2014) *Spear phishing attacks underscore necessity of digital vigilance*, CPJ. https://cpj.org/blog/2014/11/spear-phishing-attacks-underscore-necessity-of-dig.php.

- Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) attacks[26]
- Denial of Service (DoS) attacks and Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS – Distributed Denial of Service)[27]
- Website defacement
- Compromised user accounts
- Intimidation, harassment and forced exposure of online networks
- Disinformation and smear campaigns
- Confiscation of journalistic work product, and
- Data storage and mining

For defensive strategies see: *Building Digital Safety for Journalism*.[28]

For the implications for confidential sources and whistleblowers interacting with journalists and other media producers see: *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age*.[29]

Recognising and managing online harassment and violence

"I've been called a dirty whore, a bloody Gypsy, Jewish, a Muslim slut, a Greek parasite, a disgusting migrant, a stupid psycho, an ugly liar, a biased hater. They keep telling me to go home, to kill myself or they will shoot me, cut my tongue off, break my fingers one by one. They keep threatening me with gang rapes and sexual torture."[30] These are the words of celebrated Swedish journalist Alexandra Pascalidou, who testified in 2016 before a European Commission session in Brussels about her experiences online.

The global proliferation of this kind of online abuse targeting women journalists and commentators has led to the UN (including UNESCO[31]) and other agencies recognising the problem, and calling for actions and solutions.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has sponsored research that demonstrates the international impact of online abuse of female

26 Technopedia definition of Man in the Middle Attack (MITM): "A form of eavesdropping where communication between two users is monitored and modified by an unauthorised party. Generally, the attacker actively eavesdrops by intercepting a public key message exchange and retransmits the message while replacing the requested key with his own". https://www.techopedia.com/definition/4018/man-in-the-middle-attack-mitm.

27 See definitions at Technopedia. https://www.techopedia.com/definition/24841/denial-of-service-attack-dos b. https://www.techopedia.com/definition/10261/distributed-denial-of-service-ddos.

28 Henrichsen, J. et al. (2015). *Building Digital Safety for Journalism* (UNESCO) Paris. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002323/232358e.pdf.

29 Posetti, J. (2017). *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age* (UNESCO). Paris. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248054E.pdf.

30 Posetti, J. (2016). *Swedish journalist Alexandra Pascalidou Describes Online Threats of Sexual Torture and Graphic Abuse* in The Sydney Morning Herald, 24/11/2016. http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/news-and-views/swedish-broadcaster-alexandra-pascalidou-describes-online-threats-of-sexual-torture-and-graphic-abuse-20161124-gswuwv.html.

31 Posetti, J. (2017). *Fighting Back Against Prolific Online Harassment: Maria Ressa* in L. Kilman (Ed) op cit See also: Resolution 39 of UNESCO's 39th General Conference which notes "the specific threats faced by women journalists including sexual harassment and violence, both online and offline." http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002608/260889e.pdf.

journalists who are disproportionately targeted for 'hate trolling'.[32]

That research followed a study by British think tank, Demos, which examined hundreds of thousands of tweets and found journalism was the only category where women received more abuse than men, "with female journalists and TV news presenters receiving roughly three times as much abuse[33] as their male counterparts". The keywords for the abusers were «slut», «rape» and «whore».

A hallmark of this online abuse of female journalistic actors is the use of disinformation tactics – lies are spread about their character or their work as a means of undermining their credibility, humiliating them, and seeking to chill their public commentary and reporting.

The addition of threats of violence, including rape and murder, and the 'pile on' effect (organic, organised, or robotic mass attacks against a person online) worsen the impacts.

The intimate nature of these attacks, often received on personal devices first thing in the morning and last thing at night, further sharpens the impact. "There are days when I wake up to verbal violence and fall asleep with sexist and racist rage echoing in my ears. It's like a low-intense, constant warfare", Pascalidou says.

In the Philippines, *Rappler* CEO and Executive Editor, Maria Ressa[34], is a case study in combatting prolific online harassment in the context of a massive disinformation campaign with links to the State. She is a former *CNN* war correspondent but she says none of her experiences in the field prepared her for the massive and destructive campaign of gendered online harassment that has been directed at her since 2016. "I've been called ugly, a dog, a snake, threatened with rape and murder," she says. Ressa has lost count of the number of times she has received death threats. In addition, she has been the subject of hashtag campaigns like #ArrestMariaRessa and #BringHerToTheSenate, designed to whip-up online mobs into attack mode, discredit both Ressa and Rappler, and chill their reporting. "It began a spiral of silence. Anyone who was critical or asked questions about extrajudicial killings was attacked, brutally attacked. The women got it worst. And we've realised that the system is set up to silence dissent - designed to make journalists docile. We're not supposed to be asking hard questions, and we're certainly not supposed to be critical," Ressa says.[35]

Maria Ressa's fightback strategy includes:

- Recognising the seriousness of the problem

32 OSCE (2016). *Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists*. http://www.osce.org/fom/220411?download=true.

33 Bartlett, J. et al. (2014) *Misogyny on Twitter*, Demos. https://www.demos.co.uk/files/MISOGYNY_ON_TWITTER.pdf.

34 Maria Ressa is chair of the jury of the UNESCO-Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize https://webarchive.unesco.org/20210405005819/https://en.unesco.org/prizes/guillermo-cano/jury.

35 Posetti, J. (2017). *Fighting Back Against Prolific Online Harassment: Maria Ressa* in Kilman, L. (Ed) An Attack on One is an Attack on All (UNESCO). http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259399e.pdf.

- Recognising the psychological impacts and facilitating psychological support for affected staff
- Using investigative journalism as a weapon in the fightback[36]
- Asking loyal audiences to help repel and contain attacks
- Tightening security on and offline in response to harassment
- Publicly calling on platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) to do more to curtail and adequately manage online harassment

While dealing with the rising threat of online harassment, it is also important to acknowledge ongoing offline harassment of women journalists in the context of disinformation campaigns. For example, Australian investigative journalist Wendy Carlisle was abused, heckled and jostled during a climate change denialists' rally in Australia in 2011 while making a documentary for ABC Radio. The abuse led her to leave the event to ensure her safety.[37]

Module Aims

This module will: inform participants about the risks of online abuse in the context of 'information disorder'; help participants to recognise threats; and provide skills development and tools to assist in combatting online abuse. The aims are:

- To increase participants' awareness of the problem of malicious actors targeting journalists, their sources, and other online communicators in disinformation/misinformation campaigns;
- To enable participants to better recognise 'astroturfing', 'trolling', digital safety threats, and online abuse,
- To equip participants to be better prepared to combat 'astroturfing' and 'trolling', digital safety threats, and online abuse in a gender sensitive manner.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will:

1. Have a deeper understanding of the impacts of online abuse on journalistic actors, journalism, information sharing, and freedom of expression;

36 This was also a tactic deployed by Ferial Haffajee in the 'Gupta leaks' case study referenced earlier. She used investigative journalism techniques and digital security 'detectives' to unmask some of the trolls who had been targeting her in an effort to discredit her reporting of the scandal. See: https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/fake-news-peddlers-can-be-traced-hawks-20170123.

37 Carlisle, W. (2011). *The Lord Monckton Roadshow*, Background Briefing, ABC Radio National. http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/the-lord-monckton-roadshow/2923400.

2. Be more aware of the problem of malicious actors targeting journalists and other online communicators in disinformation/misinformation campaigns;
3. Understand the particular safety threats confronting women doing acts of journalism online;
4. Be able to more easily recognise malicious actors online, along with incidents of 'astroturfing', 'trolling', digital safety threats, and online abuse;
5. Be better equipped to combat 'astroturfing', 'trolling', digital safety threats, and online abuse in a gender sensitive manner.

Module Format

This module is designed to be delivered face-to-face or online. It is intended for execution in two parts: Theoretical and practical.

Linking Plan to Learning Outcomes

A. Theoretical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
An interactive lecture and Q&A (90 minutes), which could be delivered traditionally, or via a webinar platform, designed to encourage remote participation. Lecture content can be drawn from the theory and examples supplied above. However, course convenors are encouraged to also include culturally/locally relevant case studies in the delivery of this module.	60 - 90 mins	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

B. Practical

Module Plan	Number of hours	Learning Outcomes
A workshop/tutorial (90 minutes) which could be facilitated in a traditional classroom setting, or via an eLearning platform like Moodle, Facebook groups or other services that enable remote online participation. The workshop/tutorial exercise could adopt the following format: • Divide tutorials into working groups of 3-5 participants each • Each working group is to be provided with an example of malicious content (Search blogs and social media channels for content created to target Maria Ressa, Jessikka Aro, and Alexandra Pascalidou, for example, whose cases are discussed in this module) connected to a dis/misinformation/trolling/astroturfing/online abuse campaign. • Each working group must: collaboratively assess the material (research the individual/group behind the material); identify risks and threats (referring to relevant research about impacts contained in recommended readings); propose a plan of action for responding to the material (this could include replying strategically, reporting the user to the platform or police if appropriate, assigning a story on the issue); write a 250 word summary of their plan of action (using Google Docs or a similar collaborative editing tool) and submit to their lecturer/tutor for review	90 - 120 mins	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Alternative structure

For deeper treatment of the issues, this module could be expanded to run as three separate lessons (each delivered in two parts, as described above):

- Recognising and responding to 'trolling' and 'astroturfing'
- Digital threat-modelling[38] and defensive strategies
- Recognising and managing gendered online harassment and violence

38 Stray, J. (2014). *Security for journalists, Part Two: Threat Modelling*. https://source.opennews.org/articles/security-journalists-part-two-threat-modeling/.

Suggested Assignment

Write a 1200-word feature story, or produce a five-minute audio report, a three-minute video report, or a detailed interactive infographic based on an interview with one or more journalists about experiences of online abuse (e.g. being targeted with disinformation and/or facing digital security threats as part of a disinformation campaign and/or harassed or subjected to online violence). Participants should cite reputable research as part of their feature and explain the implications of the impacts of these phenomena for journalism/freedom of expression and the public's right to know.

Reading

Aro, J. 2016. *The cyberspace war: propaganda and trolling as warfare tools*. European View. Sage Journals, June 2016, Volume 15, Issue 1. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1007/s12290-016-0395-5.

Haffajee, F. (2017). *The Gupta Fake News Factory and Me* in The Huffington Post. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/ferial-haffajee-the-gupta-fake-news-factory-and-me_uk_5c7eaa44e4b078abc6c24e7f.

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Riley M, Etter, L and Pradhan, B (2018) *A Global Guide To State-Sponsored Trolling*, Bloomberg: https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-government-sponsored-cyber-militia-cookbook/.

Stray, J. (2014). *Security for journalists, Part Two: Threat Modelling*. https://source.opennews.org/articles/security-journalists-part-two-threat-modeling/.

Online resources

VIDEO: *How to Tackle Trolls and Manage Online Harassment* – a panel discussion at the International Journalism Festival, Perugia, Italy (April 2017) with Julie Posetti (Fairfax Media), Hannah Storm (International News Safety Institute), Alexandra Pascalidou (Swedish journalist), Mary Hamilton (*The Guardian*), Blathnaid Healy (CNNi). Available at: http://media.journalismfestival.com/programme/2017/managing-gendered-online-harrassment

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This handbook seeks to provide an internationally-relevant model curriculum, open to adoption or adaptation, which responds to the emerging global problem of disinformation that confronts societies in general, and journalism in particular.

Serving as a model curriculum, the publication is designed to give journalism educators and trainers a framework and lessons to help students and practitioners of journalism to navigate the issues associated with 'fake news'. We also hope that it will be a useful guide for practising journalists.

The contents draw together the input of leading international journalism educators, researchers and thinkers who are helping to update journalism method and practice to deal with the challenges of misinformation and disinformation. The lessons are contextual, theoretical and in the case of online verification, extremely practical. Used together as a course, or independently, they can help refresh existing teaching modules or create new offerings.

It is part of the "Global Initiative for Excellence in Journalism Education", which is a focus of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). The Initiative seeks to engage with teaching, practising and researching of journalism from a global perspective, including sharing international good practices.

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